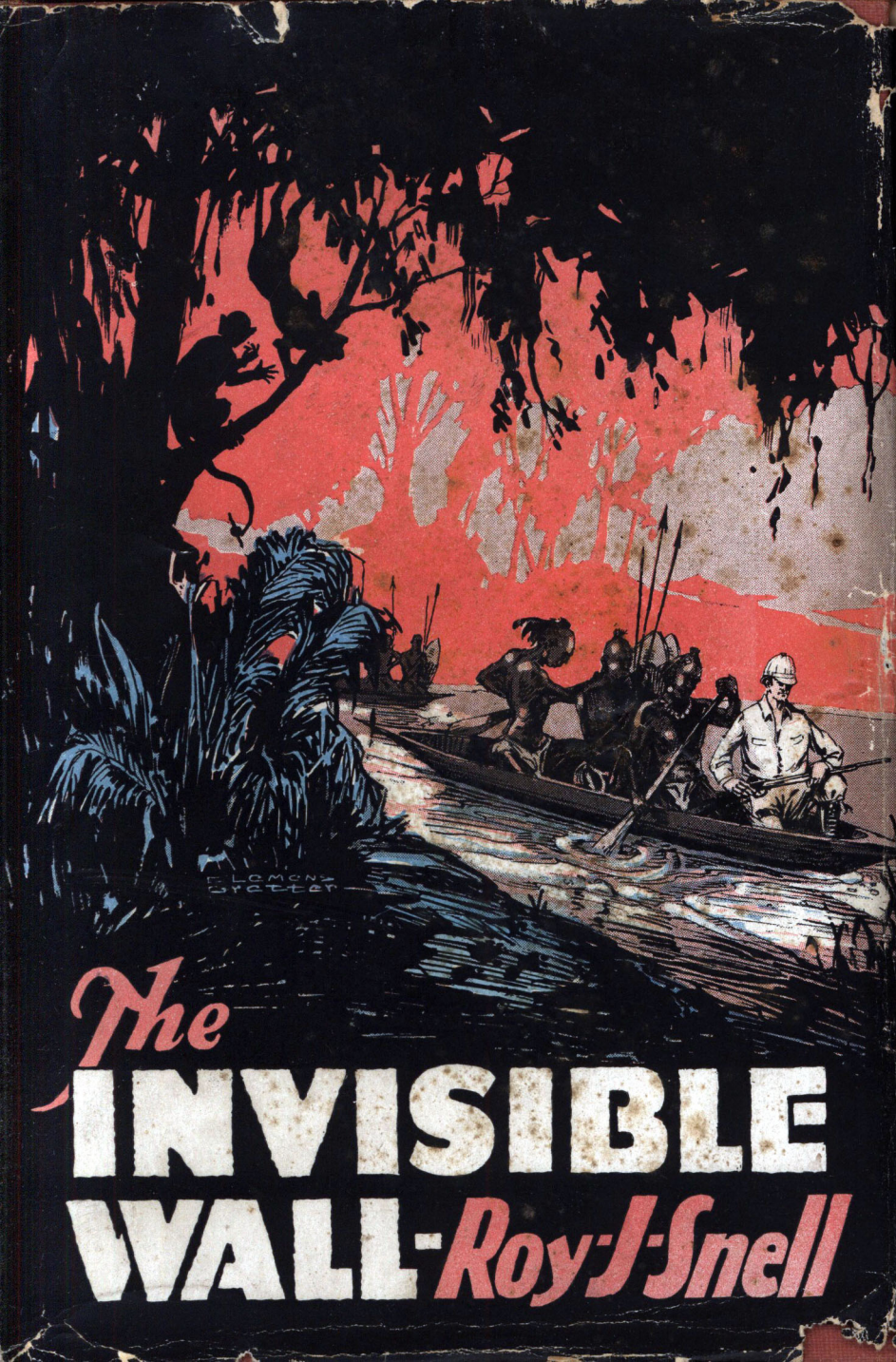

The INVISIBLE WALL

Roy J. Snell

The Invisible Wall

By Roy J. Snell

"You will not return to Manaos. There will be an Invisible Wall which you will be unable to pass." Thus spake the Witch of Manaos. It was a prophetic warning of the perils that would beset them—perils which only cool heads and stout hearts could overcome.

Eighteen hundred miles up the Amazon, in territory little known to the white man and inhabited only by savage head-hunters and hostile Indian tribes, over crocodile infested w a t e r s and swirling whirlpools, through d e n s e jungles wherein lurked dangers known and unknown, the lure of "white gold" beckoned Curlie Carson and his sturdy companion, Dave Townsend.

And in this search for "white gold" Curlie and Dave find adventures rushing upon them as rushed the rapids of the mighty river up which they journeyed. Rich in local color, breath-taking, swift moving, and intensely interesting is this new Roy J. Snell story that will keep the reader on tip-toes to the very last chapter.

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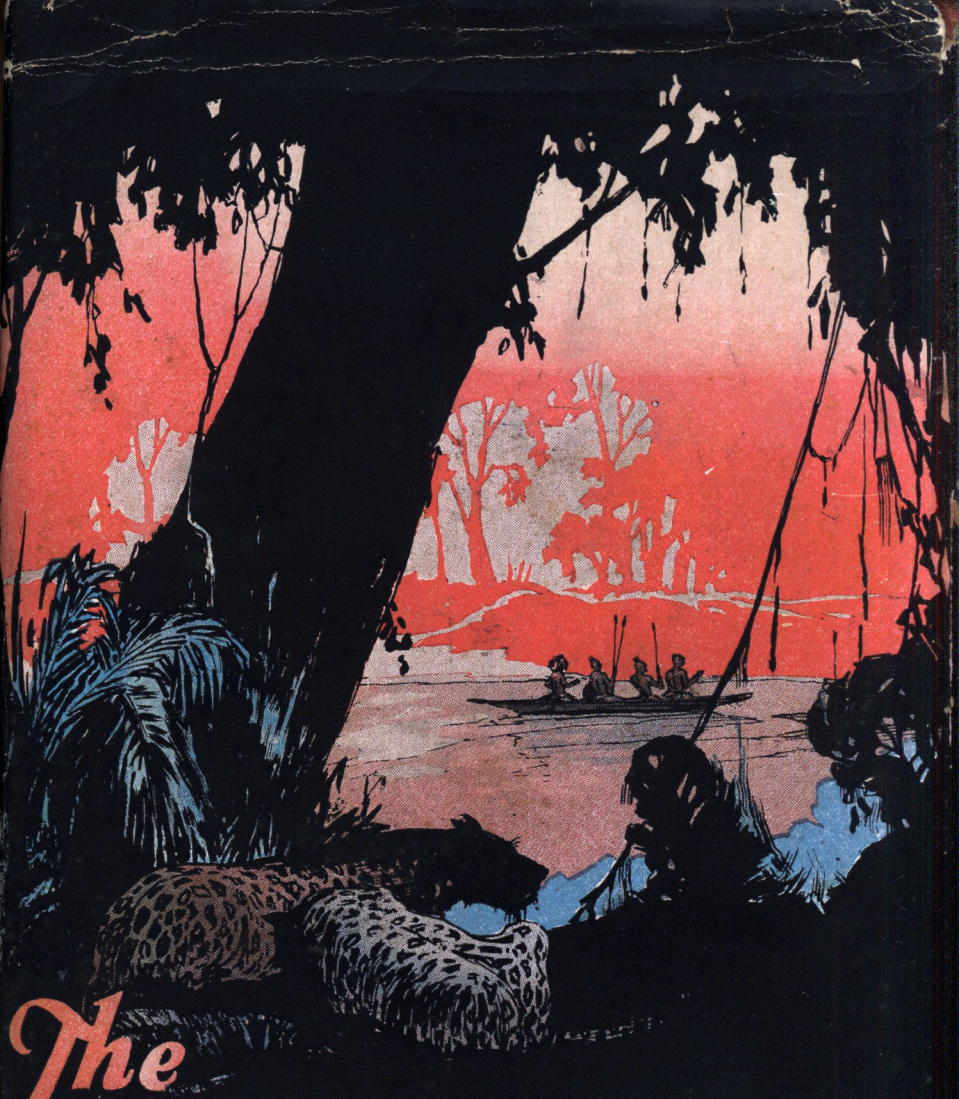

The INVISIBLE WALL

Roy J. Snell

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The Invisible Wall

The Invisible Wall

By
ROY J. SNELL

The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago New York

Printed in the United States of America

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The Invisible Wall

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THE INVISIBLE WALL

CHAPTER I

WHITE GOLD

"You will pass an invisible wall. Time after time you will attempt to make your way back from beyond it. You will not succeed. You will not return to Manaos."

Curlie Carson shivered in spite of himself at these words, and the "Witch of Manaos," as the creature who sat before him styled herself, peered sharply at him.

What was it that caused him to shudder? He and Dave Townsend had entered the place laughing. A joke, a fine sort of prank it would be to have one's fortune told by this wizened old Indian in this one of the strangest cities the world has ever known. They had come in

laughing. They had remained to grow sober.

What had brought about this change? Was it because they were in a strange city a thousand miles up the Amazon in the heart of South America? Was it because of their immediate surroundings? They were eerie enough, surely. A witch-like old woman sitting between great purple drapes that appeared ready at any moment to close in and swallow her up, such was the "Witch of Manaos." Two long teeth in her upper jaw, one in the lower, skin brown and dried like ancient parchment, hands that were forever shuffling a greasy pack of cards—and all this lit up by a large ball of glass that, illumined somehow within like the eye of a mammoth cat, changed from moment to moment. Now purple, now livid green, now fiery red, this ball appeared to follow the mood of the "Witch of Manaos."

"An invisible wall," Curlie thought. "How could a wall be invisible?" In his mind's eye there appeared a ten-foot thick wall of glass towering to the sky. At that moment, as if to

give reality to the picture, the globe turned a light sea green.

"You will not return to Manaos," the thought came again. But he and his pal had no notion of returning to this city; that is, if they went down the river on the Lloyd's steamer that had brought them. And, of course they would.

"That's easy," he laughed. "We were not thinking of returning."

"You will think of it many, many times." The globe was changing from green to red. "You are going up the river, not down, a thousand miles, more—more—up—up—up." The horny hands flung wide. "You are going hundreds of miles up. You will pass an invisible wall. You will not return to Manaos." The place was now in almost complete darkness. Only the old woman's eyes shone back at the ball that had turned a deep purple.

"Come on. Let's get out." Dave pulled at Curlie's arm. "I don't like her talk."

Curlie laid a silver dollar on the small table

before him, then turned to go; yet even as they passed into the blinding light of tropical afternoon they heard again, in unearthly cackling tones, the words, "An invisible wall!"

* * *

"Well, boy, what do you say? Do we go?" Eager blue eyes looked frankly, inquiringly into Curlie's as these words were spoken.

Curlie started. Only six hours had passed since the "Witch of Manaos" uttered her strange prophecy. Yet here was a man proposing that he and Dave Townsend accompany him on a journey eighteen hundred miles up from Manaos over uncharted waters of the upper reaches of the Amazon.

"You will pass an invisible wall. You will not return to Manaos." These words came now as a warning.

"This trip," he thought soberly, "eighteen hundred miles up the Amazon, in search of what? 'White gold' they called it." He had only a vague notion of what use white gold could be put to; knew only that it was very

valuable and that this man Clinton, whom they had met but the day before and who to all appearances was some hardy American adventurer, knew where a considerable quantity of it was to be found at the head of the Amazon.

Up the Amazon. Curlie's blood raced at the very thought of it. When had he not dreamed of floating down that great river catching monkeys, crocodiles, boa constrictors, jaguars for the zoo? The pictures in his old geography had inspired this dream. Now, led on by that old dream, he was up the Amazon, a thousand miles from the sea.

That thousand mile trip had been disappointing. He had come up in a Lloyd's steamer, and had seen only endless mangrove jungles and muddy little villages. Then he had come to a city in the heart of the wilderness, a city with a million dollar opera house and floating docks that cost many millions.

"No adventure here," he had said to Dave. Then, almost as if in answer to his challenge, this American, Clinton, had come to them with

a daring proposal. They would go another eighteen hundred miles up the Amazon in search of "white gold"—whatever that was.

To better outline his proposition to them, Clinton led them secretly at night down a dark and narrow street, where in a black hole by the docks was a half rotten dugout. Lifting the palm leaf covering of the dugout, he switched on his flashlight to disclose its cargo.

"White gold," he said. "Two thousand dollars worth of it." Then he snapped off the light.

"Who found it?" Curlie asked.

"Couple of Colombians. I know them—met them up the Monegra six months ago. They told me then where they were going.

"Evidently," he added with a sigh of satisfaction, "they found what they went after."

"They'll tell others," said Curlie.

"No. They won't. This is Brazil. They are from Colombia."

"They might go back for more," said Curlie.

Again Clinton shook his head. "Beyond

doubt there are thousands, more likely millions of dollars worth where this came from. But they'll not go back, and they'll not tell.

"I know their kind," he added thoughtfully. "Dogs in a manger. They'll have a thousand dollars apiece when they sell this boatload. A thousand will keep a man a lifetime down here. It's a long, hard, dangerous pull up that thousand miles of river. No steamboats after you have gone half way; only a dugout and paddles, and natives—wild Indians with poisonous blowguns, and big, fat, greedy native kings ready to rob you.

"No," he said decisively, "they will not go back and they won't tell."

"We'll go half way in a rickety old steamer," he told the boys as they sat staring through the open window at the dark sweep of the Amazon. "After that we'll have to trust to native boat crews, wild men, Indians, head hunters, for all I know. There are some up there—plenty of them.

"But we'll take good care of our own pre-

cious heads," he added, bestowing a glance upon three shining rifles in the corner. "And we'll return to Manaos rich!"

"You will not return to Manaos." The fortune teller's words rang once more in Curlie's ears. *"You will pass an invisible wall. You will attempt to repass this wall, and will not succeed."*

And yet, in spite of this witch's warning, he would go up the Amazon with Clinton. He knew that well enough. He thought of Dave. Dave was big. His broad wide back and thick neck would make two of Curlie's; yet he had always, until now, stayed close to home. This trip was his first adventure.

"Adventure!" Curlie had said scornfully. "About as much adventure in coming down the coast and this far up the Amazon as riding a bus in Chicago."

"But now," he said, looking into Dave's eyes, "our adventure begins. Or does it?"

"Yes," said Curlie to Clinton, "we'll go."

CHAPTER II

THE CROCODILE KING

Curlie and Dave sat on the bank of a broad river, the Rio Negro. They were more than seven hundred miles from Manaos. Having come to a pause in their journey, they had nothing more important to do than to watch the antics of a child and the slow sweep of black waters.

Travel on the upper reaches of the Amazon is strange. The first six hundred miles of the Rio Negro had been accomplished with ease. A trading steamer had brought them that far. But after this, one goes as he may. They had brought no boat of their own. Without men, a boat large enough to carry their personal belongings, their rifles, axes, machetes and trade

goods, would be useless. Three men could not drive it against the current.

Clinton carried in his pocket a letter written by Jatty Jay, the great trader of all the Amazon basin, to the men who did business with him, the brown and black kings and princes far up the river. This letter lent them a helping hand.

The first man they reached beyond the steamer's last landing place was a Spaniard. When properly paid he furnished men and a boat for the next hundred miles.

"Beyond the mouth of the river Uaupes my crew must not go," was his strict command, "for at that place lives our enemy, the Crocodile— 'He who makes the water bloody,' the natives call him. He is a bad man and an Indian killer. But then, you have your letter. Who knows? He may give you a boat and a crew to carry you forward.

"But after that," he shook his head in warning, "you will be in grave danger. There are wild Indian tribes. What do they know of

Jatty Jay? How can they who have never been to school read his letter? If they think you are a friend of this too-terrible Crocodile King of Uaupes, then surely they must shoot you with poison darts from their blow guns, as they have done to three traders not so long ago."

To all this Clinton gave solemn attention, but went straight on his way. He had traveled, so he told his young companions, on the headwaters of other branches of the Amazon. Up this one he had a task to perform. He would go. If at any time they felt themselves in too great danger he would pay back the money they had invested in trade goods and they might return the way they had come.

The two boys looked in one another's eyes for a second, then joined in the assertion that they would "stick."

They found the Crocodile King of Uaupes quite up to the description given of him. A great fat, coarse, black-brown man, he was lolling in a hammock when they arrived. A

sawed-off shotgun served him for a pistol. A rifle large as a cannon leaned against the wall within easy reach. Yet he received them with a show of kindness and promised, for pay, to furnish them men and a boat. The boat might need calking. The men would not be too strong, for times were hard—but they should have a boat and men. Why yes, to be sure.

The boat and crew were not yet forthcoming, hence their dreaming beside the river. Clinton silently joined them. Then the three of them sat watching a child and a man. The man, a wrinkled and toothless Indian, so old and dried up he seemed ready to blow away, was teaching the child to swim. The child, who could not have been more than seven, was enjoying the lesson immensely. But the old man, with his strange cracked laugh, seemed to be enjoying it even more.

"Wherever you find an old man, you will find a child," Clinton philosophized. "India, Africa, heart of the jungle, it's all the same. Fine thing, too. Old man knows much that

the child should know. Child helps the man to a cheerful old age. One regrets—"

"Look! What's that?" Dave sprang to his feet.

A green, moss covered object, fourteen feet long, had risen silently to the surface. It was quite close to the laughing, swimming child.

At first it seemed a bit of timber which, long watersoaked, had by some miracle risen at last to the surface. It was not. It was a giant crocodile.

Before one could think what was to happen, there came a sudden scream from the child.

That instant Dave dived head down into the green-black water. As he rose, not six feet from them, the monster and the child sank. The crocodile's teeth held the child's slender legs within their grasp.

It was a tense second. Dave did not hesitate. Down he went. There followed a swirling, a bubbling and seething, that lasted for fully half a minute. Then to the astonishment of all, the child's head bobbed above the water,

and after that Dave's. Ten seconds later the child and Dave were safe on shore. And, curiously enough, beyond a few bruises the child was quite unharmed.

"How did you do it?" Curlie asked his pal after the excitement subsided.

"Easy enough," said Dave with a grin. "Just poked my thumb and finger in the old dragon's eye. When he opened his mouth I seized the child and beat a retreat. What could have been easier and sweeter?"

"Tell you the truth," he said quite soberly a moment later, "I wouldn't go through it again for all the white gold this side the Andes. But what was there to do? You couldn't sit there and see the child eaten!"

Just what the villagers thought of the performance they never knew. That the old man and the child thought of Dave as a hero was evinced by the way they followed him about.

Then a rather curious occurrence bound Dave and the aged Indian in closer communion. Ever interested in the unusual, both

as to the works of nature and man, Dave might often have been found peering round in dark corners.

Though he might truthfully be called an Indian killer, the Crocodile King, being part negro, had in his make-up a streak of indolent good humor. He did not object in the least to Dave's wandering through the ruins which had once been his castle.

In the height of his glory, when "black gold" came gliding down this stream, this king had known untold wealth. At this time he imported tons of lath, plaster and fancy tile. With these he built a gaudy palace, and within he arranged costly furniture, upholstered chairs, chandeliers aglitter with pendants, a huge music box and a piano brought a thousand miles on a raft.

The palace was in ruins now. The tropical warmth and damp had done their worst. The tiles were on the floor, the pictures hung awry, the piano was mute.

Yet it was in this very decayed palace that

Dave found a thing of imperishable worth, an ancient Indian drum.

On attempting to lift the thing, he learned it weighed at least three hundred pounds. A great cylinder of hard wood, hollowed out through hand holes with the crudest of implements, dating, as it must, far back of the days of the rubber hunter, it was a thing to marvel at.

"Where did you get it?" Dave asked of the King as he rolled it out into the sun, there to admire its carving and bright coloring.

"Traded a rifle for it in the good times, far up the river." The fat king shrugged his shoulders.

"Anyone here who can beat it?"

"One man."

"Bebino," said the king, speaking to a boy, "Go fetch that old Indian who *sabe* much tom-tom."

The boy returned a few moments later. And who should the drummer be but the aged

friend of the child Dave had rescued from the crocodile in the river?

At a word from their master, two Indians slung the drum with ropes to an overhanging mahogany branch.

Then the drummer's concert began. Gripping two sticks tipped with balls of native rubber in his horny hands, the old man tossed them about for a few seconds. Then, ever so lightly he touched the wood drum. There came from it a faint roar.

Curlie, who was standing nearby, shuddered in spite of himself. "It's like the low call of a lion to his mate," he told himself.

But now the drummer began in earnest. With a series of long beats and short beats, of low beats and loud ones, he made the silent aisles of the jungle echo with the roar.

"They say," said the king during a brief interlude in the concert, "that those people used this as a signal drum to call their tribe to battle. They claim it can be heard for fifty miles."

The old Indian was beating the drum again. Fairly going into a frenzy, he did not desist for half an hour. When at last he threw himself exhausted upon the damp earth, Curlie found himself full of wonderings.

Had this king truly traded for the drum, or had he taken it by force, and perhaps at cost of human lives? And this strange old man. How had he come here? And why did he stay? He was of the tribe who had once used the drum, that was evident.

He spent a full hour wondering about these things, but nothing came of his wonderings at this time.

CHAPTER III

MYSTERIES IN THE DARK

Curlie stirred uneasily in his sleep, then of a sudden sat straight up. Some sound had wakened him—but what? Though he sat at strained attention, he caught no sound. The night in the great Amazon jungle was still as death.

He opened his eyes. He saw nothing. All about him was inklike darkness. All about him, but none the less real, stretching forth without end, were countless aisles. These aisles were formed by tropical giants, a hundred, two hundred feet tall. And beneath him?

Suddenly becoming conscious of a great dead leaf that had fallen upon his mosquito canopy, he gave the canopy an upward push

that sent the leaf soaring down. There followed a splash.

A light, strong hammock hung between two trees alone stood between him and sweeping, treacherous waters where all manner of great beasts had their home. These were the upper reaches of the Amazon. He and Dave and Clinton had come far since that memorable meeting in Clinton's room. At this time of the year the banks of the great river are inundated for miles on end.

As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he made out a black bulk to the right, then another to the left of him, and a much larger bulk three yards downstream. The two were his sleeping companions; the third the great canoe-like *monteria*, the Amazon dugout in which they traveled.

The nearness of his friends gave him comfort, and he was about to lie down to sleep once more when a sudden sound made him start and stare into the dark. Plash-plash-plash, it came at regular intervals.

"Like some great beast walking through the muck," he told himself with a shudder.

And yet, what beast could it be? Some prehistoric monster? Absurd. An elephant? Not in South America.

"It's my imagination," he told himself. "Nothing but—"

His thought broke short. There it was again, plash—plash, plash—plash—plash—five times. His heart skipped a beat. Should he arouse his companions? For a space of a few seconds he considered this, but in the end decided on silence. They slept soundly. The day had been a hard one. Why not let them rest? If a guard were needed, why should he not carry on?

"Absurd fears," he told himself when a long period of unbroken silence had passed. "No creatures here but water beasts—manatee and crocodiles that cannot reach us. Haven't seen a tapir, a sloth, nor even a monkey for five days. No creatures in the forest. It's silent,

dead, drowned out. Not a living thing. And yet—"

As he listened there came another, quite different sound, an all but inaudible noise, like the light dip of a single paddle. It sounded for some time, then suddenly ceased.

"Natives about; wild savages." Again his pulse quickened. "And yet, how could there be? No people live here. Natives do not travel at night, at least not the men of Uaupes. There are devils in these swamps at night, so they say. What can it have been? There—there it is again."

This time the sound seemed nearer; as if borne on by the current it floated silently toward them. Once more the boy considered waking his companions. As before, he remained silent.

Feeling the flashlight in his pocket, he was sorely tempted to send its yellow light gleaming out over the dark waters. "No. Not safe," he told himself. "Blow guns. Poison darts. The darkness protects us. We are safe."

So, sitting there wide-eyed in the dark, he began to think of the strange grouping of circumstance that had brought him to this out of the way place so fraught with possibilities of tragedy or romance. Would he live to regret his decision?

He thought of the days at Manaos, and of Clinton's strange proposition and their acceptance. He thought of white gold and wondered vaguely about it; thought too of the fortune teller's prophecy.

"Well, anyway, here we are," he sighed as, failing to catch again the mysterious plash-plash-plash which probably was overripe fruit dropping into the muck, he settled back to sleep.

He was comforted by the dark bulks of his companions dimly outlined beside him as they slept in their hammocks. In the dugout, wrapped in blankets for protection from insects and vampire bats, were the black crew. They were now eight hundred miles up the Rio Negro, and to-morrow, God willing,

would go still higher. With these last thoughts, he fell asleep.

True to his word, the Crocodile King had, after what seemed endless delay, furnished them with a twenty-five foot craft capable of carrying two tons of equipment and with a nondescript Indian crew. It was this boat that gently bumped a great tamarind tree as the boy slept, and this Indian crew lay sprawled about on the bales and boxes that formed their equipment. They were a hundred miles above the Crocodile King and his castle. A hundred miles more, and the king's men would leave them. What then? The boys did not worry overmuch. They were young and life was new. The great unexplored lay before them. Surprises awaited them at every bend of the river. As for Clinton, all things were alike to him. His heart was never troubled.

So the three explorers slept until the morning sun, sending parallel beams through the vast tropical wilderness, drove away the morning mist and ushered in a new day.

During the noon hour rest of that day Curlie bumped squarely into a strange adventure. In one brief moment he was made to realize as never before what a fragile thing was the span of life in tropical wilds.

The Indians on the upper reaches of the Rio Negro have a pleasing custom. After the noonday meal of farinha, they enjoy a swim in those black limpid waters.

Little fearing the crocodiles that sleep at this hour, and longing for relief from the hot greenhouse-like air of the jungle, Curlie joined them.

After swimming about for a time, he turned upon his back and lay perfectly still, allowing the river to carry him whither it would.

Curious experience this, drifting down an unknown stream in an unexplored land. The boy liked it all the better for that. To watch the low spreading palms, the great towering sapodillo and mahogany trees glide above him, to drift on and on as in a dream, that was bliss unalloyed.

"But one must not drift too far," he told himself. "There are small islands, other channels. Might get lost. What chance would a white boy have, naked, unarmed, alone in such a land?"

The thought caused him to turn quickly over and begin making his way upstream.

He was doing the Australian crawl when his ear, close to the water, caught a sound, something between a snort and a grunt.

One strong stroke, one good look, and he was momentarily relieved.

"Only one of the Indians," he thought as he caught sight of a round head above the deep greenish black of the water. But what was this? The fellow was a great swimmer. He was making fine speed. What was more, he came straight on toward him.

One more look, a very hasty one. The next second found the boy headed for a small palm grown island. The head he had seen did not belong to a human being, but to some water beast three times his size. Little wonder, then,

that his heart beat fast, that his breath came short and quick as he raced over the surface of the water.

The beast came on, gaining. Now it was ten yards behind, now five, now three. And now, now, with a last despairing effort, the boy made the fern-grown bank.

Gripping a tree root he hung there panting. Ten seconds passed; then with a heroic endeavor he threw himself up, to lie panting on a bed of moss.

"But the monster?" His mind began to work again. "What is it? Can it travel on land as well as upon the water?"

Scrambling to his feet, he allowed his gaze to sweep the black waters. Then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Only a manatee! A poor, harmless manatee! What a fool I have been. And yet, who could know?"

He was destined within the next few moments to witness that which brought no laugh, nor even the faintest smile to his face.

CHAPTER IV

SUDDEN DEATH

Though often weighing as much as eight hundred pounds, the manatee is as harmless as a fish. Indeed, he is a hundred times less dangerous, for there are fish in these strange waters more dangerous than the greatest sharks of the ocean.

For the present Curlie's whole attention was taken by the scene being enacted before him, a manatee sporting in the water. A rare enough sight it was, too, for though he had read of these elusive beasts he had entertained little hope of ever seeing one.

The manatee's only defense its protective coloring and its ability to remain at the bottom of the river, this curious "sea-cow"

usually remains hidden from view. Only when bits of water grass rise to the surface above the spot where it is feeding does one become aware of its presence.

What had tempted this particular manatee from its watery lair? Had it mistaken this lone boy for one of its own kind? Or, had such an unusual sight as a white boy swimming in those uncharted waters tempted it from its dark retreat? Whatever it may have been, its boldness invited sudden death.

As the white boy stood motionless in the shadows watching the clumsy beast, now drifting silently and now beating the water with its flippers and circling the broad river, he became conscious of some other creature near at hand. The bronze body of a dwarf Indian boy was silhouetted against a giant palm leaf, not ten yards beyond him. And in his hand was a deadly blowgun.

Instantly Curlie's mind was in a whirl. Who was this boy? When had he come? Were there others, many others? There were no

villages within a hundred miles. What target was to meet the aim of his poisonous dart?

"Ought to get out of sight," the white boy thought. "And yet, he is watching the manatee. He does not see me. A move, a snapping twig, and he will know I am here."

A moment passed, one long breathless moment—another and yet another. Still the figures, one of bronze, the other of marble, stood motionless. Only the manatee moved. Circling wide, he at last came closer and closer to the motionless bronze statue. And now the white boy was to witness an act which he would not soon forget.

Lifting the tip of the blowgun to his lips, the Indian boy tilted it slightly, glanced down its eight foot bamboo barrel, puffed his cheeks, and drew them in like a hand bellows. That was all. So far as the white boy could see, nothing had passed, yet the great, gray-green beast shuddered, turned half about in the water, like a dog bitten by a flea, and then

began doing crazy stunts in the water. His movements slowed gradually, and in a moment he floated bottom up on the river.

"Dead! Stone dead," thought the white boy. A bead of perspiration trickled down his nose. The next instant he stepped noiselessly into the shadows, for the Indian boy, now in a narrow dugout, shot out from the shore in pursuit of his dead and drifting prey.

"The poison they use at the tips of their darts for their blowguns is as deadly as arsenic," Clinton said to Curlie as, still trembling a half hour later, he related his adventure. "Only thing for us to do is to avoid provoking them to a point where they are ready to do us battle.

"Strange, though," he said a moment later, "where that lone boy could have come from. Where he is going is more than I can tell."

"He was nosing about our camp last night," said Curlie. "I heard the strokes of his paddle."

"You did?" said Clinton sharply. "Then we

must set a watch. There are more dangers in this dark old forest than one dreams of."

To this last Curlie heartily agreed. Twice within an hour, in a land so still that you could hear a leaf drop, he had been frightened nearly out of his wits.

It was agreed that they should divide the short tropical night into three equal watches. For the different watches they drew lots. To Curlie fell the three-hour period of from eleven o'clock until two in the morning.

"A grand and glorious time for sitting up alone in the dark," he said to Dave. "Absolutely silent then. If the old Crocodile King should turn over in his hammock, way back there in Uaupes, I believe one would hear him."

Curlie turned in early. He felt that he had scarcely fallen asleep when he was awakened from a wild dream of Indians riding down stream on sea-cows' backs.

"Your turn to watch," Dave told him.

"Nothing to report. Eleven o'clock, and all's well. Goodnight."

That night they had not camped above the flood, but found a tiny palm-grown island, large enough to accommodate the campers, but so small that there was little opportunity for movement. Besides, one does not choose to disturb the night's silence by even so much as the sound of soft footfalls when he has a creeping feeling that those very slight sounds may draw a poison dart from a canoe drifting past in the dark.

So, sitting there alone with the great silent tropical night, Curlie gave himself over to thought. They were long, long thoughts, for they were thoughts of youth.

First in the mental panorama that floated before his mind's eye were the vivid pictures of the day. Again the manatee followed him in the water, then went sporting on in the stream. The bronze statue drew his attention. Then followed sudden tragedy. The manatee floated bottom up, dead.

As he stared away into the night he seemed to see in the dark flow of water the dead, drifting beast.

"Will I sometime float like this?" he asked himself.

He shook himself free from these doleful thoughts. In searching about in his mental attic for finer material out of which to create mental images, he brought forth first thoughts of their mission up the Amazon and of the two Colombians who had found a fortune in white gold up there.

"Will we too come floating down this stream with two *monteria* loaded with white gold?" he asked himself. He dared hope so, yet there were days of peril and much labor ahead. He must not hope too much. "What of the savages? Were they truly head hunters? Would they face grave perils?"

"In this world one should ask himself three questions, and ask them over and over," Clinton had said to him only the day before.

"What are they?"

"One should ask himself, 'Am I kind? Am I honest? Am I brave?' If the answer is always 'Yes' I believe one is safe anywhere, even in this wild land. After all, humanity is everywhere much the same. If savages find that you are kind to them, honest in every way and quite fearless, they will repay you in kind. They will treat you as you have treated them. And remember this one more thing. Strange as it may seem, in this wild land where there is neither telephone, telegraph nor radio, your reputation travels far before you."

"How can that be?" the boy had asked.

The wise traveler but shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," Curlie thought to himself now as, with sense alert, he sat alone there in the dark, "Dave at least has had an opportunity to prove to the people of Uaupes that he is both kind and brave. And if it is true that our reputation goes before, then the people upriver must know by now." He was thinking of Dave's

experience with the old man, the child and the crocodile.

As he sat out his watch there in the heart of the silent jungle, Curlie wondered once more about many things. This Crocodile King —was he the robber-villain men painted him? There was a whirlpool in a rocky canyon below his home. Only his men could pilot a craft by this terrible whirl of waters when the river was high. Men hunted rubber in the dry season and went down with their loads after the river had risen. The king had exacted exorbitant pay, so the story ran, for the service rendered by his men. If this was refused he killed the owners of the boats, then took all.

"Is it true?" the boy thought with a shudder. "If it is, how will we fare if we pass his palace with a treasure of 'white gold'?"

Since this could not be answered, he turned his thoughts to the ancient drum and the aged drummer.

Strange to say, at that moment a sound,

faint, indistinct, but unmistakable, stole over the jungle.

"The drum," he whispered. "It can't be. We are a hundred miles away. I am asleep. I am dreaming."

But no. He pinched himself to make sure that he was wide awake. Still the drum notes, now faint, now quite distinct, sounded through the night.

Hardly had the last note died away than from up the river, much closer at hand, there sounded louder, more distinct, the notes of a second drum.

"There are others. We are surrounded," the boy thought as a thrill ran up his spine. "For war," he repeated the king's words, "to call men together for war. Are we to be attacked?"

His first impulse was to arouse his companions. A soberer thought told him that the nearest drum must be several miles away; that there could be no immediate danger.

So for a full half-hour, thrilled, charmed,

fascinated as he had been by no other concert, however grand, he listened to the talking of the drums.

In time the last note died away and silence, deep and ominous, hung over jungle and river.

CHAPTER V

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Morning came at last. With every palm leaf a silver plate of dew, every clinging vine a necklace of diamonds, the jungle gave forth no indication of that which might have passed during the night.

So with the Crocodile King of Uaupes behind them, with unknown tribes ahead, they pushed their way up the silent river.

Still the land about them was flooded. From the tree-tops there came neither scream of parrot nor chatter of monkey. The golden coat of the jaguar did not gleam from atop a fallen tree. No tapir sprang up at their approach to go threshing away through the brush.

"It's safe enough," Curlie said to Clinton, "but so still. One feels a desire to shout."

"Shout, then," Clinton smiled.

The boy did shout. He shouted at the top of his voice. The aisles of the forest, like ghosts wakened from ages of slumber, caught up the note and flung it back at him. Time after time, faintly and yet more faintly it was wafted back until—

But what was this? As if some distant loud speaker had caught it and increased its volume tenfold, the shout came back to them in one clear bell-like note. Then again silence reigned over the jungle.

The boy looked at the man. The man returned his gaze. Neither smiled. Neither spoke. The shout was not repeated again, by the boy nor by the voice of the forest.

So they glided on and on up the river. Since the strong current of midstream drove them close to the bank, they were in constant danger of knocking great colonies of ants from their homes on bending tree trunks.

Once, caught in a swirl of water they were brought in contact with one of these ant-infested trees. The battle that followed was not without its laughter and pain. The ants, great dark creatures an inch long, fought furiously. In the end the humans won, and the *monteria* glided onward.

As night began to fall they passed out of the swamps into a land of high river banks and tall trees.

Here, as they all knew quite well, new perils awaited them, for where there is dry land there are people.

What were these people to be like, this tribe of Tucana, as they were called? Had they believed half they had heard on the upward journey they must have turned back long ago. Away back in Manaos, the capital city of the Amazon region, Jatty Jay, the great trader, monarch of untold millions, warned them, "Beware of the Tucana. They are wild and evil. They killed three of my

traders, shot them full of poison blowgun needles and set them afloat in their boat."

The aged Spaniard who lived below the rapids said, "The Tucana are *miuto peligerosa* —very dangerous." That rascal, the Crocodile King of Uaupes, had said, "They are my enemies. My men can take you only to the border of their land. If they go farther they must be killed, and who knows, they may be eaten as well." As for the men, the moment they came to dry land it became quite evident they were maintaining a watch all their own.

And yet, as they made camp they assured the three white voyagers that the land of the Tucana was still five days' journey upstream and that for four additional machetes and three axes they would carry them all that way. So the bargain was struck, and Curlie lay down to sleep and to dream of wild brown men dancing about a great kettle hung over a blazing fire. And what was in the kettle? The dream did not tell. He awoke to find

his garments soaked in perspiration, and that in spite of the fact that the damp air of night carried with it a chill which had not been experienced in the deeper forests down river.

"I will sleep again," he told himself. "I'll dream no more." He did sleep. No dreams disturbed his slumbers, but in the morning a strange new adventure awaited him.

CHAPTER VI

A MAD PACK

"We'll be through with that old tub in a few days—four or five at the most," Clinton said as he gave the ancient craft furnished by the Crocodile King a contemptuous kick. "Good thing, too. Sooner or later she'll spring a sudden leak, some rotten slab of wood in her will give way and down she'll go to the bottom."

"But what are we to do when she's gone back down the river?" said Curlie, eager to learn of future plans. "Those wild natives, killers of white men—"

"We won't trust them too much," Clinton broke in. "Guess you can leave that to me. I've knocked about in these parts a good lot."

"Oh, of course," said Curlie, instantly apologetic, "I was only wondering."

"Boys will wonder," the man smiled a broad smile. "They should. Wouldn't learn anything if they didn't.

"Well, I'll tell you," he leaned comfortably back against a cocoanut palm, "this is what I've planned. Of course, if we should happen upon some friendly natives going upstream it would save us a lot of hard work. But we're not likely to. And if we don't we'll build a boat of our own. I've a half dozen models of native boats in my kit. We've plenty of tools, screws and nails. That's about all we need. See that tall tree yonder?"

"Yes."

"It's mahogany. Fine wood for boat building. A little brittle, likely to crack. But there are plenty of black tamarind trees about. No better wood in the world than that.

"My plan," he surveyed the river thoughtfully, "is to land and make camp in three or four days. If the old fellow who is guiding

us now tells the truth, we will still be a couple of days below the stronghold of the much-feared Tucanas. We'll land all our supplies and have our present crew build us a couple of bamboo huts. Then we'll begin work on some sort of a canoe. It can't be too large. We'd have difficulty in handling it. Even poor old Robinson Crusoe made that mistake, and couldn't launch his boat after it was done. We should be able to make one we can manage.

"When it is done we'll load up and push cautiously along upstream. We'll try to pass the Tucana settlement at night. That should not be hard. Farther up there may be friendly natives who are willing to work us on upstream for some presents of calico, axes and machetes."

"So that's the plan," said Dave as Curlie repeated it to him later. "Well," his brow wrinkled, "it looks as if we had let ourselves in for considerable adventure."

"And hard work," said Curlie.

"Oh, that. Why yes, the two usually go together, don't they? You're not likely to have much of an adventure in an arm chair, are you?"

"Well anyway," said Curlie, "I'm for it. Think what we'll have to tell when we get back home."

"Home," said Dave thoughtfully. "Is there really such a place, or did I only dream it?"

A careful investigation after breakfast revealed to them the sad truth that their *monteria* was but a sorry craft. She had been leaking more and more. They found her waterlogged and at the bottom of the stream. To raise this heavy dugout to the surface and bale her dry required two hours of arduous toil. After that nothing remained but to calk her as best they could with palm fibre and heavy resin gathered from trees. Since this work could best be done by the native boatmen, Curlie took a rifle and went wandering away into the jungle. He hoped to come upon a covey of wild turkeys or a drove of little

peccary pigs. In this he was not destined to disappointment. The manner of his coming upon the prey was, to say the least, quite unusual.

Following down a low trail made by tapir or wild deer, he made his way in a stooping posture for some little time. Since there were no trails branching off from this one, there was no danger of losing his way.

Soon the trail left the deep underbrush to spread out over a sparsely grown rocky ledge. As he crossed this ledge the boy blazed a tree here and there.

"Take no chances," he told himself.

A careful survey of the ridge revealed no sign of life.

He had passed down the other side of the ridge and was about to disappear once more in the brush, when of a sudden from off to the left there came a strange confusion of sounds. Low grunts, high-pitched angry squeals, a strange medley of cries.

"Monkeys," was his first thought, "Red howling monkeys.

"But no. Not quite that. I have it! Pigs. Little wild pigs. Here goes! Oh, you roast pork for dinner!"

Throwing discretion to the winds, he dashed along the side of the ridge, to at last plunge into the jungle.

Once he paused to listen. The grunts and squeals grew louder. Pigs! His guess was right. What was more, he was close at hand.

"But what's got them so tremendously excited? Jaguar, perhaps."

This thought gave him pause. These great, golden-coated six foot long cats were not to be lightly thought of.

"But if it's a jaguar the pigs have him treed." He gained courage from that.

"The jaguar," Clinton had told him not three days before, "is fond of peccary meat, but he takes no chances. Those little wild pigs go in droves. If one member is killed the whole pack turn upon the killer. Not to

be sneered at, either; got tusks like razor blades. Knew an Indian once who had seen them tear a jaguar into shreds."

"Have to be careful," he repeated as, stepping lightly from bush to bush, he parted each cluster of branches to peer into the space beyond.

The sight that at last met his gaze as he came out of the thick brush into a clear spot beneath giant sapodilla trees was enough to send cold chills up his spine and to bring him up short with both wonder and fear.

About a small fallen tree a great mass of angry wild life was milling. Peccaries. Were there a hundred, a thousand? No one could have told, so madly were they tumbling one upon another.

At their back on a clear bit of ground lay one of their number, dead. Before them, atop the tallest branch of a fallen tree was, not a jaguar, but a boy, the Indian boy who had killed the manatee down river before Curlie's very eyes.

That he was now in mortal terror, expecting every moment to be torn from his post and destroyed, was quite evident. That his fears were not without reason was shown by a slow trickle of blood over his bare ankle where one of those razor-like tusks had already found its mark.

The whole story of what had gone before flashed instantly through the white boy's mind. The mysterious, wandering Indian, while hunting with a blowgun, had killed a peccary. The band of peccaries, with the strange ways they have of connecting cause with effect, had rallied to the attack. Having in his fright chosen a haven of refuge that was too low, the boy was now in momentary danger of being torn limb from limb.

There was no time to be wasted. Having located a bread nut tree with low hanging branches, Curlie lifted his rifle and fired point blank into the milling mass of wild life. Four times in quick succession his rifle rang out. Then, seeing a great double-tusked beast turn

and start for him, he sprang to his tree and climbed well up into the branches.

Twenty seconds later the whole mad drove, save the maimed and dead, raced madly along beneath his tree.

Strange to say, they did not pause, but went charging straight on. Three minutes had not passed before that part of the jungle was as still as a graveyard at midnight.

And the Indian boy? As Curlie allowed his eyes to wander to the dead tree which had been his precarious haven of refuge, he saw that he too had vanished.

Twenty minutes later, with two plump young peccaries, killed when he fired into the milling pack, slung over his shoulder, he was retracing his steps back to camp.

As he walked he wondered, wondered who this dwarf Indian boy might be, and whether he would ever meet him again.

CHAPTER VII

THE DIAMOND SET GRATER

It was Dave—sturdy, stout hearted, adventurous Dave—who met with a surprise as he leaped from his hammock next morning. His feet, instead of striking bare earth, as he had expected them to do, came down upon something cold and round.

With a yell that set the forest echoing, he bounded a dozen paces away before he turned about to discover that he had not, as he thought, stepped upon a poisonous snake.

"A stick!" he exclaimed in disgust. "Only a stick. Who put it there?"

Both Clinton and Curlie stared at him blankly. "Not guilty!" said his pal. "But look! It's a carved stick! How queer!"

"That's strange," said Dave, staring hard at the stick. "It wasn't there last night. And only look! How elaborate the carvings are—little curves and curlicues and diamonds. A face here, a hand there, and here a serpent real as life. Done in hardest kind of wood, too; mahogany or something like that. Take a man hours and hours to do it."

Suddenly Clinton looked up in astonishment. In three quick strides he was at the boy's side.

"That," he said after turning the stick about in his hand, "is a rare prize. In all my South American wanderings I have seen only one like it. It may prove of great service to us. At Uaupes I searched in vain for a medicine man who could make me one. I even offered an Indian twenty dollars if he could find me the man. It seems the king's men knew of no such man. That old Crocodile King is a hard master. Medicine men are accustomed to show some authority in their tribe. That would not suit the king."

"But what's the thing for, and where could it have come from?"

"I can't tell you whence it came. Haven't the slightest notion," said Clinton. "I can tell you only part of its meaning. With the tribes we may happen to meet it may have no meaning at all. Let's hope it may.

"An explorer who has traveled all over this country once showed me one similar to it. I made him teach me the ceremony connected with it. You might say it was a calling cane, or a cane of introduction.

"You see," he leaned back and smiled, "back home if you wish to make a call upon some one you don't bolt right in. You send in your card, or a letter of introduction. When you wish to call upon one of the upriver chiefs, this cane is your letter of introduction. Those elaborate carvings," he said, taking the stick and examining it carefully, "tell a story."

"What do they say?" asked Dave.

"How should I know?" Clinton laughed. "I am not within the inner circle. Only the

medicine men and chiefs can read what's written there.

"Of one thing I am sure," he continued, "whoever made this stick made it and meant it for us alone. It is new, freshly carved. Strange, isn't it?"

It was strange. As Dave sat contemplating the mysterious stick he was overtaken by a feeling that this vast jungle was inhabited by spirit people.

"Angels and devils," he murmured half out loud.

Of one thing he was very certain; he would not allow that precious stick to get lost from the pack. He would guard it well. As soon as possible he would persuade Clinton to teach him the ceremony he had spoken of.

This set him wondering afresh about Clinton. Who was he? What was his mission in this wild land? He had made it quite clear that he had not come solely nor mainly to search for white gold. Beyond this he had divulged nothing.

His actions had not made plain his purpose. Some men might have guessed. Dave could not. He was greatly interested in trees. He was forever hacking into the trunks of fallen giants of the forest and carrying away samples of wood. Once he had spent a whole forenoon cutting away the underbrush before a curious flowering tree. After that he took a photograph of the tree. That was all.

He knew a great deal about animals and birds, but most of all, it seemed, about primitive men.

"The world need not fear for its supply of cabinet wood," he had said to the boys one night as they lolled about camp. "Here in the heart of South America are a million square miles of virgin timber, mahogany, ebony, rosewood and other cabinet woods, and hardly has a tree been touched."

Was he then the representative of some great lumber concern, a scout sent on to blaze the way for tram roads, sawmills and rafts

and steam boats? And was his interest in savage people only a sort of side line?

"He does not tell us anything about himself," the boy mused. "And yet some men are that way. I'd trust him farther than some men who talk too much."

Certainly one could ask for no better traveling companion. Clean, clear-eyed, square dealing, even-tempered, ever ready to do a little more than his share, already this man Clinton had won his way far into the inner depths of the boys' hearts.

That evening they camped upon a high sandbar a little way from the river's bank. There was a certain safety to be had from such a camping place. At least they could not be attacked from land. As they came nearer and nearer to the land of the terrible wild Tucana tribe, their boatmen grew more and more restless.

"Only the promised reward at the end of our journey will keep them at their task," Clinton said as his brow wrinkled. "Perhaps

at last even this will fail." Veteran of the wilderness though he was, he in the end found himself utterly unprepared for the sudden end that finally came.

The evening meal over, Dave and Curlie wandered a little way up the sandbar. There on a high bank of sand they sat down to watch the steady sweep of black water.

"Seems to sort of suggest that we hop into some craft and follow its current down," drawled Dave.

"That's just what I was thinking," said Curlie.

"Hate to be a piker, though."

"Yes."

"But life's mighty well worth the living."

"Sure is."

"This jungle," Curlie went on a little later, "sort of gets my goat, takes my breath away; you know, those little wild pigs now. You wouldn't think there'd be any harm in them. Not a bit bigger than a jack rabbit when they're dressed. But man, Oh man! you

should have seen them! Hadn't been for me, that Indian boy just wouldn't be, that's all. They'd have eaten him. Suppose it had been you or me? Same thing."

"Same thing," Dave echoed.

"Nature is strange," Curlie rambled on. "She's kind enough when she's properly tamed. But down here she's wild—wild as they make 'em. Big snakes, jaguars, water monsters, poison darts; only question seems to be, which will get you first."

"And yet," said Dave, rising to fling his arms high, "it's a mighty interesting sort of life. And there's 'white gold.' We'll find it soon enough now."

"If the Tucana don't stop us."

"They won't," said Dave. "Don't forget my calling cane."

"Dave," said the other boy quickly, "who put that cane beneath your hammock?"

"Ask something easy."

"Queer, isn't it?"

"It is."

"And spooky."

"And there was that drum in the night," Curlie continued. "You can't hear one of those things a hundred miles can you?"

"Don't stand to reason."

"Then what—"

There came a sudden splash in the river. Dave jumped a foot in air.

"Little fish jumping to escape a killer," he grumbled. "Come on. The night and your talk have got me going."

While the two boys were talking Clinton could not have heard a word they said. Yet, as they started toward the three tents they had pitched on the sand, he left the circle of light by the campfire and dodged into his tent.

Just as the boys came up he emerged from his tent. In his hand he held an object somewhat resembling a small washboard.

"It might interest you," he said quietly, "to know that this, too, came from somewhere out there back of beyond." He swung his arm in a

broad circle to include all the wild, unexplored land before them.

"One of those things the natives use for grating up mandioca roots to make potato flour," said Dave, taking it in his hand. On the surface of this board a resin-like gum had been smeared. Out from this cooled and hardened surface sharp bits of stone stood like teeth in a grater. These bits of stone made it an efficient grater for tearing the great potato-like roots into shreds.

"This one's a dandy," said Dave enthusiastically. "Made from the stump of a very old mahogany tree. And such wonderful carvings. You wouldn't expect the savages to be such artists."

"It's rather well carved," said Clinton quietly. "That's why the Brazilian trader got it from them. But that's not the reason I paid him a rather unreasonable price for it. Examine it closely."

With their curiosity now thoroughly

aroused, the two boys carried the thing into the circle of firelight.

"Queer," said Dave, "those bits of rock sparkle."

He drew his hand over the rough surface. Instantly he let out an exclamation of disgust.

"The thing cut me." He held up a bleeding finger. "Must be glass."

"Not glass." Clinton drew a small pill bottle from his pocket. Placing the grater on the ground, he turned the bottle around on the sharp point of one of the projections. Then with a thumb and finger he easily snapped the bottle in two.

"Cut," said Curlie in amazement. "Cut clean as a whistle."

"What cuts glass?"

"Diamonds."

"Right! These are diamonds. A rather low grade, but diamonds all the same, and quite valuable. If you had a sack full or even a fair sized match box full of them, you'd have a fortune."

At once the boys were all excitement. Questions flew thick and fast. Where had the grater been purchased? Was it far up the river? Was the tribe a dangerous one? Did one find diamonds in gravel banks or beds of streams? When could the search begin?

Clinton's words cooled their heated minds. "Once one discovers the tribe," he said soberly, "it will be a simple matter to find the diamond mine. But the tribe, that's the bother. This Brazilian was far up the right branch, adventuring and rubber hunting, when he suddenly came upon a large company of natives.

"They took him captive and were about to kill him. In the end, by a showing of kindness and good will, he saved his life.

"They took him by a trail, which he assured me he could not with any amount of good fortune retrace, to a large village, miles back in the bush.

"After keeping him there for more than a month, they brought him by a yet more bewildering trail to the river and let him go. As

a parting gift the old chief presented him with this grater which he had often admired."

"Oh! Ah!" the boys sighed in unison. It was evident that their little castle of cards had tumbled in a heap.

"There is one chance," Clinton went on more hopefully, "and that a rather good one. These wild men have an uncanny way of knowing the workmanship of other tribes. Probably their frequent invasion of others' territory has taught them much. If we come up with a friendly tribe they may tell us where the makers of diamond set graters live."

"Of course they could," said Curlie enthusiastically.

"But this," said Clinton, putting a hand on the grater, "is not what brought me into the jungle."

CHAPTER VIII

A STRANGE INITIATION

That evening Dave took his first lesson in the strange and mysterious rites of the jungle.

"Now that you have that very wonderful calling stick," Clinton spoke seriously, "you must learn what goes with it."

"Now," he went on, "you have your stick. This," selecting a straight smooth bit of bamboo, "we will say is the chief's stick. You have come to a spot on the river bank close to a native village. Perhaps you are short of food, and wish to trade knives, cloth or beads for farinha, wild bananas or wild pork. Or, you may wish to hire a guide. Whatever you desire, you must not rush right up to the village. That might mean death. These Indians of the

upper Amazon fear and sometimes hate the white man. They have had sad experiences. They have been robbed. Their women have been carried away. They have been compelled to gather rubber without food or pay.

"But the native knows, as you and I know, that there are both good and bad white men. If you honor his customs, if he has an opportunity to try you out, to look you through and through, all may be well.

"You will wonder," this man of jungle lore went on quite seriously, "why I am telling you all this. It is because I realize, far more truly than you do, the uncertainty of life in these reaches of a mighty river. A fever, a poison dart, a springing jaguar may at any moment carry me to lands beyond the setting sun. Should this happen, then you must be prepared to go on without me.

"Now," his tone became less mellow, more business-like, "you are close to a village. You wish to make a call. You land and make camp. In time a messenger appears, or perhaps he is

only a curious boy. It does not matter, he will understand. You show him your calling cane. He takes it and runs with it like an office boy to his master, the chief.

"You wait. The suspense may be great, the time of waiting long, but you must not grow impatient and crash in. If you intrude upon a business man's privacy the most he will do is to have you thrown out on your ear. These up-river chiefs are different. They are likely to throw you in the river, your body bristling with poison darts.

"You wait. The boy returns. If he carries only your stick, get your things on board and paddle off as rapidly as you can. This is a sign of great disfavor, equal to a declaration of war.

"If you see in the messenger's hand two sticks, then you take your stick from him and set it in the ground. The other, which the messenger still holds in his hand, is the chief's stick. He will set the stick beside your stick.

"Then, with the two sticks standing as a

fence between you, you kneel, the messenger kneels. He says, *'Hath thia pure Kariwa.'*

"You must say in return, *'Hath thia binne Spangu.'*

"After this the messenger will turn and walk back to his village. You must take your stick and follow. There are other important ceremonies to be gone through with at the chief's house. We will go into that tomorrow night. For this evening we will attempt to fix this one ceremony in your mind."

So, time after time they set the two sticks in the ground, to kneel before one another while the man chanted solemnly, *"Hath thia pure Kariwa"* and the boy quite as solemnly answered, *"Hath thia binne Spangu."*

"I wonder what it all amounts to," Dave whispered to Curlie as at last wrapped in their blankets they prepared for slumber.

Little did he guess how soon and in what a strange manner this question was to be answered.

CHAPTER IX

THE SINGING MONKEY

It matters little where the white man travels, Siberia, Africa or the upper reaches of the Amazon; if he uses native boatmen he is subject to their wild fancies and strange superstitions. It was even so with the three voyagers. They might not decide upon the hour of camping nor choose the campsite. All this must be done by the head canoeman. Now they came to a pause a good two hours before nightfall, and now they moved for a full hour through the black and eerie air of night before pausing to camp.

"Why?" Curlie asked time and again.

The answer was always very strange. "We could not camp back yonder, Senor, for on

that sandbar live three devils, a man and his two grown daughters. They sit on men's heads as they sleep." "Oh no, Senor, we could not go farther on this day. There is no campsite ahead for many miles save one. That belongs to the river god. If we camped there he would be very angry. Our boat would be wrecked; huge crocodiles would be sent to eat us; or the light of day would turn us black like the waters of the river." Always there was a reason, and always it was conclusive. The will of the boatman could not be broken. Neither bribes nor threats moved him. When he said, "Here we camp," camp here it was.

So it happened that the next afternoon the two boys, finding camp pitched a good hour before dark, took their rifles and went in search of wild game.

It was on this little hunting expedition that they met with a strangely-haunting experience that was destined to remain in their minds for many days to come.

Their search for game had been singularly

unsuccessful. Night was coming on and they were thinking of turning back when they caught the long-drawn piercing call of a red howling monkey.

Now monkey meat when properly dressed and broiled over a fire of glowing coals is as sweet and delicious as squirrel or little wild pig. The native boatmen had often teased the boys in a good natured way because of their lack of success as nimrods.

"We'll show them," whispered Dave, gripping his rifle hard, and darting down a tapir trail which led in the direction of the sound. "We'll bring them a red howling monkey for their supper."

The monkey howled again and yet again. Bursting through a tangled mass of palms and ferns, the young hunters came to a spot where trees were few and large.

"There! There he goes!"

"Get him."

"There he is. Here goes."

Curlie lifted his rifle for a shot when with a

marvelous flying leap their prey left a sparsely leafed mahogany tree to disappear in the spreading branches of a breadnut tree.

"Huh!" Dave grunted with disgust. The breadnut tree, a giant of its kind, hung full of great clusters of stringy leaves.

"Never get him now," said Curlie.

"Might as well go back." Dave turned half about, parted two broad palm leaves, then paused in astonishment. They had suddenly come upon a well defined trail.

"A man's trail," the boy's tone was low. "See! The brush has been cut away."

For a moment they stood there undetermined as to their next course of action. They had been led from the tapir trail by the red monkey. Beyond doubt they could find their way back to it. But a strange trail in the jungle has its fascinations. One feels impelled to follow it.

"Probably goes directly to the river," suggested Dave.

"But if we meet a band of savages?"

"We have our rifles."

All this had been said in low tones. They were still well within the shadows.

"Listen!" said Dave, "what's that?"

From the tree into which the red monkey had gone there came a strange whistling sound.

"Didn't know a monkey could sing," said Dave.

"He can't. It's a bird."

"Curious sort of bird. Never heard a bird sing like that. Will a bird stay in a tree with monkeys?"

"Don't know. Listen!" Curlie gripped his companion's arm. The notes that came from the tree took on a semblance to a tune played on some crude musical instrument.

"Like a bagpipe," whispered Dave as they crept instinctively nearer.

"Hist!" Curlie pulled Dave back.

Beneath the tree, staring up into it was a brown native boy.

"It's that boy," Curlie's lips trembled, "the

one who shot the manatee, the one I saved from the wild pigs."

Just then a twig cracked under Dave's foot. The Indian boy whirled about, then shot headlong into the jungle.

But the sounds from the tree did not cease. Instead they became more puzzling; for of a sudden from crude music they turned to the plaintive notes of a violin. The tune that fell upon their ears was an ancient Spanish love song.

"It's a plant—a trap, set for us," said Dave.

"By Indians?"

"Indians."

"Never. They couldn't play that way."

"We—we'd better go. It's getting dark." In spite of his splendid courage, Dave was shaking all over.

"All right."

They crept from their hiding and, by common consent, took to the well beaten trail.

Fifteen minutes later they were at the bank of the river.

"Camp's lower down," said Dave.

By leaping from rock to rock here, following a low sandbar there, then creeping on hands and knees over a trail where they might at any moment catch the angry gleam of a jaguar's eyes or the startled stare of a little wild deer, they at last made camp.

"Empty handed," laughed Clinton. "Not a shot fired, I'll wager."

"Not a shot," said Curlie.

To Dave he whispered aside, "Shall we tell him?"

"He wouldn't believe us," the other boy whispered back. So the episode of the red howling monkey who could sing like a bird, also play a violin in a creditable fashion, remained a secret known only to the boys.

Did they believe that all this had been done by a monkey? They did not. By a naked savage? This they also doubted.

"Perhaps," said Dave as later in the evening they sat lost from sight in the shadows, "we

have come upon our Old Ben Gunn up here in the jungle."

"Perhaps too," Curlie added, "like Ben Gunn, he knows of a hidden treasure."

That evening Dave took his second lesson in jungle statecraft. He learned the ceremony which must be performed if one is invited to visit a chief in his home. It was well for him that he learned the lesson well. Long, dark and sinister shadows were creeping on this little expedition.

Knowing nothing of these shadows, inspired perhaps by the burst of music from a treetop, Curlie got out the one musical instrument of his party, a slim straight saxophone. With this he treated the jungle to such a series of squeals as had never before awakened it. Then his mood changed, and this time the boy played a cradle song, sweet, low and melodious. As the last low note died away Dave thought he caught the sound of a stealthy movement in the bush nearby. Instantly his flashlight illumined the wall of brush. Then he started

back. Had he seen a face there, a dark, glistening face with black teeth and smiling lips? He thought so. But now it was not there.

At the same instant, faint and from far away, as if in answer to the saxophone's song, there came the wavering tone of some musical instrument.

"The singing monkey again," said Curlie with a voice that trembled.

"Or—" said Dave.

"Or what?"

"Who knows?"

CHAPTER X

"THE TUCANA! THE TUCANA!"

To lend a hand to the boatmen, with bare shoulders and sun-browned arms streaming with perspiration, to paddle and pole, to wade waist deep in black waters where crocodiles lurk, to swing an axe at fallen trees that block the boat's progress, all this is in a day's labor of an upstream journey.

To lie on soft warm moss beneath a golden moon, listening to the night birds' songs and the low murmur of boatmen's voices, with the day's perils and trials past and gone, with the long night of peace ahead, to lie thus and dream of 'white gold' and diamonds, of lands unseen and tribes unknown, this is the joy of the jungle river.

Only one matter troubled the three voyagers as they lay conversing in low tones. The miserable boat the Crocodile King had supplied them was leaking more and more.

"Seems that the more those men calk it the more it leaks," said Dave.

"Well," said Clinton, "our kit and pack are safe enough. We will go forward somehow."

What he said was true. By dint of much packing and toiling up a steep bank, they had brought all their goods ashore.

"It won't last much longer," said Curlie. "We'll soon be building our own good mahogany *monteria.* We—"

Suddenly he paused to listen. Wild exclamations had come from the river bank where their native boatmen were camped.

"Tucana! Tucana!" It was the dread name of the river tribe they called. Then came *"Impesa phoni. Iuga Tucana shilso!"*

Only Clinton understood the common language of the river spoken by the excited

natives. He leaped to his feet and went racing toward the river.

He was too late. The boys caught the sound of oars and of panting groans inspired by mortal fear.

"They have gone!" exclaimed Dave in wild consternation.

"They will be back when they are over their fright," said Curlie. "What did they say?"

"I doubt if they will return, or so much as pause until they have reached the protecting walls of their rascal king's camp," said Clinton quietly. "What they said was, 'Here are footprints! It must be the Tucana!'"

"Do you think it could be?" Dave's voice was full of fear.

"I doubt it. We will have a look. Probably only a single footprint of a wanderer. We are not in such a bad way. We have all our kit. Just as well build our craft here as farther up."

As he spoke, Clinton examined the river bank. Now the light from his electric torch

shot a long way ahead and now it pointed a small yellow circle at his feet. Then of a sudden it went out.

"Wha—what happened?" asked Dave in some alarm.

"Guess we better not show any more light tonight." Clinton's tone was quiet, but a trifle strained.

"Why?"

"Where are our rifles?"

"In—in front of your tent."

"We'll get them."

In dead silence the three made their way through the darkness to the tent.

"We'll go over to the pile of stuff and lie there and watch. It will make a barricade of a sort. Even with rifles three white men are few enough in the dark."

"You see," he explained in a whisper a moment later as they lay among the bales and boxes of their pack, "for once those rascal Indians were right. They did stumble on the track of the Tucana, not a single track but a

well beaten foot trail. There are marks of a dozen canoes in the mudbank. Their settlement must be just up yonder a little way from the river. The cries of our boatmen, or our light, may bring them upon us at any moment. Our hope lies in darkness and absolute silence."

"But we were not to reach their settlement for several days," said Curlie.

"That rascal boatman did not know. He was guessing. He missed his guess."

"And now we are here," sighed Dave. Down deep in his heart he wished he were in a quiet little house called home, way back in good old Illinois.

"Yes," said Clinton, "we are here, and being here, must make the best of it. For the present we can only wait, watch and hope."

After that the silence of the great wilderness closed in upon them. The all but inaudible sweep of the river rendered the silence more vast. The cold twinkle of stars overhead told them only that they were exceed-

ingly small and very much alone in one of God's trackless expanses.

"You are going on a long journey. You will pass an invisible wall. Time and again you will try to return past this invisible wall. You will not succeed. You will not return to Manaos." The fortune teller's words ran through Curlie's mind like a long forgotten song.

"Not return to Manaos?" he thought to himself. "That would certainly mean death or ceaseless wandering. There is no other way to the mouth of the Amazon."

"An invisible wall." He thought of their present predicament, and shuddered.

CHAPTER XI

FISHING

Through the night, the three lay silent, motionless, with rifles ready. Soaked in cold dew, they dared not search the pack for blankets. Famished after a hard day's labor, they dared not eat. Chilled, cramped, miserable, they dared not so much as stretch a limb.

When Curlie felt that he could endure the strain no longer, when he resolved to throw caution to the winds, to sit up and attempt to stare away into the darkness, he recalled the great manatee in the river. Once more he saw the naked Indian boy press his lips to the deadly blowgun, saw the manatee turn half about like an elephant tormented by a flea,

then saw him turn bottom up, a helpless bit of drift on the black surface of the river.

After that, his resolve to move was broken. These Indians were keen witted fellows. Beyond doubt they stalked game in the night, shot their poison darts on sound, not sight. One speeding dart, a moment of pain, then endless sleep. Why, at this moment his companions, lying so silent and motionless there in the dark, might be dead! The thought haunted him. In time it took so complete possession of him that he found himself compelled to whisper.

"Dave! Clinton! Are you there?"

"Yes. Yes. Be still," came from the dark.

After that dead silence.

Did a fish leap in the river? Did a twig snap in the jungle? Did a bat crack his teeth above him in the dark? Each time the boy started ever so slightly.

In the end nothing happened. The night wore on. A sunrise, painting the river red over gold and turning every dew drop into a

ruby, showed them that their fears were not without reason.

A little way into the jungle the trail became a well beaten road. This without doubt led to the homes of many people. If one doubted this, he had only to rise to his feet and allow his eyes to wander down a second path to the mouth of a small creek where many war canoes were tied.

"If we were as foolish as some white men," said Clinton, "we would load such of our goods as we could carry in one of those canoes and, without so much as saying 'by your leave,' go shooting downstream.

"We wouldn't get far; probably not a dozen strokes; certainly not a day's journey.

"No, no," he mused, "there must be another way."

"There's my calling cane," suggested Dave.

"Quite useless until someone comes. It must be taken to the chief by one of his own men. In the meantime we must wait. But let's

dig into the pack and get some cold breakfast."

Farinha, dried fish and a few little wild bananas lifted their spirits.

"It may not turn out so badly after all," said Clinton. "All men are human. We will try to do nothing that will offend."

For two hours they sat silently by their packs. Not a living creature appeared.

"I've always wanted to try fishing on this river," said Dave, rising and stretching himself. "Any taboo on that?"

"Don't know of any," said Clinton.

"Going to try it. Looks like a good spot down there. Three big rocks and a deep pool."

After digging about in a decaying palm tree stump for grubs, the boy unwound a line taken from his kit bag, tied it to a section of bamboo, then went down to take his place on the broadest out-jutting rock.

It is strange, the things associations do to our minds. No sooner was the boy seated on a rock fishing, than his mind was at peace.

Truth was, in spirit he did not find himself there at all. Once more a small, barefoot boy, he dangled his sun-tanned legs over a black mudbank and fished with worms for bullheads in a sluggish old Illinois river. Lily pads bowed and bent as the current lifted, then let them drop. A dragon fly poised on his cork bobber for an instant, then like a bombing plane bent on business, went shooting away. His bobber ducked, regained its composure, then bobbed again.

"Only a minnow," he murmured as his head bent low in near slumber. "Only—"

Of a sudden there came a tug at his stout line, such a tug as dispelled his illusion and came near playing him for a ducking as well.

In the end, he struggled successfully with the fish at the end of the line and landed him safely—a small pirarucu, but an eight pounder at that.

It was while he was removing the hook from the fish's mouth that he became conscious of eyes staring at him. To his surprise,

upon looking up he found a small native boy standing not ten paces from him and staring at him unafraid.

His first impulse was to attempt making friends at once. "Not yet," he told himself after a few seconds' reflection, "might frighten him away."

At that he rebaited his hook and went back for another try. He dreamed no more, but fished in earnest. He would show this wild boy that he was a good angler.

In time success crowned his efforts. Two other fish of the same species, one larger, one smaller, lay beside the first. And still the great dark eyes of the brown boy were upon him.

"Time to act," Dave told himself as his heart missed a beat.

Winding the line tight about the pole, he tossed it, pole, line and hook, toward the boy.

The effect was startling. With a single leap the boy was ten feet from the spot where he had stood.

He seemed about to run away. Then, upon seeing that the white boy now held nothing in his hands, and that the pole was much closer to him than to his strange visitor, he leaped forward, seized the pole, then shot away with the speed of an arrow.

If the white boy had supposed that, monkey-like, the Indian boy would imitate his actions in fishing, he was doomed to disappointment. The boy was speeding home with his newfound treasure.

"What next?" was the white boy's thought as, wrapping his fish in a broad palm leaf, he walked back to the pile of goods where his companions still sat, wrapped in silent thought.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHIEF SENDS HIS STICK

They expected the boy to return. In this they were not disappointed. Where is the boy in any land who will not return for a second look at a stranger who has presented him with a very great treasure? To this simple native boy living up there at the "back of beyond" a silk line and a steel fish hook was a prize indeed.

They expected that others would come—expected and feared. Yet they did not come. When the boy returned he was alone. Slowly, shamblingly, with ever shifting and downcast eyes, he followed the trail that led to the river and to them.

At a distance of ten paces he paused. Nor

did he come nearer. He stood there silent, dark eyed, expectant.

Then it was that Dave, at Clinton's all but inaudible command, took up his calling stick, that curiously carved cane which had come to them in such a strange manner, and balancing it by one end on the tips of his fingers sent it curving through the air.

This time the boy did not dodge. With a deftness surprising in one so young, he caught the stick. Then again he was away like a flash of light.

Once more the three sat in expectant silence. Curlie's mind was rife with speculation. He recalled Clinton's words about humanity being everywhere much the same. He had said that sympathy, kindness, bravery and upright dealing were understood by the most primitive people of the world. Could that be true? Would it prove true now?

"It's a good time to test it," he told himself.

He only half believed it to be true, so the hour that passed seemed long.

Like a moving picture the events of the upward journey passed through his mind. Before him once more the fat black Crocodile King sprawled in his hammock. Again a child played in the river, and Dave saved him from a terrible death.

"Bravery," he thought. "But how can these people two hundred miles away know of this?"

He thought of the great wooden signal drum and of the tune the dried up old native of these upper waters had played upon it.

He thrilled anew as he heard again the faint and distant tom-tom-tom that had echoed once through a silent night. The strangely carved calling stick, the mysterious dwarf brown boy who had killed a manatee, and had been saved from the furious wild pigs; these too came in for their share of wonder.

Beneath the dreamy tropical sun he had wondered himself into a near sleep when Dave, prodding him in the ribs, muttered:

"Hist!" then pointed up the trail.

As he looked he saw now not a boy, but a strongly built native warrior. In his hand he carried two sticks. Were these spears? Were there to be other warriors? Was it to be a battle, a battle to the death? Were the evil deeds of other white men, robber Brazilians and Colombians, cruel Spaniards, to be heaped upon their heads? He trembled.

But no. The man was alone. And in his hand, as he came closer, they saw two carved sticks. One was Dave's and the other—

"The chief sends his stick," said Curlie. "Thank God, we are to be received in peace. The chief sends his stick."

Five minutes later Dave found himself squatting behind the two carved sticks which had been set in the soft earth. Opposite him on the side nearest the village, squatted the stalwart warrior.

"Hath thia pure Kariwa," said the warrior.

"Hath thia binne Spangu," said Dave in a voice that cracked at the end.

That was all. Rising to their feet they stood

there for ten seconds in silence. Then the warrior, seizing his chief's stick, motioned them to follow.

Follow they did. Carrying only the strangely carved stick, leaving arms, ammunition, food, clothing, trade goods, all behind, they marched straight to a great dark hall where fifty armed warriors awaited their coming.

"Humanity is everywhere much the same," Dave whispered to himself. His ears sang. His knees trembled, but still he followed on into the great unknown.

CHAPTER XIII

STRANGE TELEGRAPHY

The winding path that led through a protective forest of mammoth trees to a broad clearing beyond could not have been more than a quarter of a mile in length. To the leaden-footed boys who followed the brown warrior, it seemed a mile. They were overcome with gloom. Who would not have been? True, their lives had been spared, but what more could they expect from these wild hunters of the Black River?

Since their lives had been spared, they would perhaps be given a small dugout, and be allowed to go downstream, not up. The canoe would not float their entire stock of goods. The greater part would be left behind.

At the mouth of this stream, on their downward journey, they would be robbed afresh by the Crocodile King. Then they would, with luck on their side, arrive at the first steamer landing, in debt and with neither money nor white gold with which to pay.

Dave whispered that there might yet be some reason to hope, but Curlie could not see it. Had they not, far back in the capital of the rubber kingdom, been warned against this savage tribe? Had not the warning been echoed and re-echoed as they passed over that long seven hundred miles of black water?

"What chance? What chance?" the boy murmured gloomily.

Arrived at the last turn in the trail, the boys were treated to a surprise. The homes of the village were immense. There were three. Not one of them could be less than sixty feet wide by one hundred in length. Sturdy structures they were, too, framed with great poles and thatched heavily, walls and roof, with bamboo.

"What can they want of such houses?" Dave asked in surprise.

He was soon to learn.

But meantime fresh thrills awaited them. Straight to the door of the larger of the houses they were led. Without a halt they entered the low door and took three steps within.

There they paused. Surprised by the vastness of the place, awed by its silence, frightened by its darkness, they stood there as if turned to stone.

At the far end of the room a hundred feet away, like evil eyes two half burned out fires gleamed. Before them was nothing. There came no sound.

Nothing? This they found was not quite true. At a distance of from four to five feet from the floor, white spots in pairs gleamed mysteriously. These, they found as they became accustomed to the light, were the eyes of men. Now they made out their forms, now heard their low breathing, now caught the

dull gleam of their stalwart shoulders, the flash of spearpoints.

Not a word was spoken. With hearts pounding at their ribs they stood there motionless. Their guide had vanished, gone to the ranks of the warriors. They were alone. What was to happen? Were they to be executed on the spot? "Fifty warriors if one," thought Dave, "and we without so much as a knife. Wish we hadn't come."

Suddenly he became conscious of something in his hand.

"My stick," he thought. "My calling stick."

With this reason returned. Searching the dimly lighted vastness, he found the chief's stick standing just before him and before this were three stools.

Taking a step forward he set his stick beside the other. Then motioning the others to follow his example, he sat down, rather limply, upon one of the stools. In silence his companions followed his example.

Instantly the line of warriors divided. An

old woman passed through. In one hand she bore a clay bowl, in the other a large, flat cake made from farinha. These she placed on a mat before them. Then she withdrew.

Dave's head whirled. He knew the next step. Should he take the plunge? What was in the dish? Meat of some sort. What was it, wild pig, monkey, lizzard, crocodile, snake? Had it been poisoned?

This was no time for wondering. The die was cast. Breaking off a bit of bread, he took a morsel of meat between his fingers. The meat and bread went into his mouth together. His throat was dry. He could scarcely swallow, yet down it went.

His companions followed his example. Instantly after that, like a clap of thunder came the shout:

"Hath thia pure Kariwa." The fifty warriors had spoken a welcome.

"Hath thia binne," Dave managed to waver back.

Instantly the dull brown ranks were broken.

The warriors clustered about the three strangers. One more ceremony was done. The worst was over, they hoped. They had broken bread in the chief's house. Now certainly they were his friends.

When the three voyagers had resumed their places on the stools the Indians settled about them on the well trodden earth that formed the floor to this mammoth hut. At once they were deluged with questions.

"What are they asking?" Dave understood not a single word.

"Who are we; where we have been; what has happened on our way; where we are going; how long we are to stay; and many other things," Clinton said. "Leave it to me. I will answer them."

For half an hour, in a language of few words and many signs, Clinton answered questions.

At the end of that time, the chief, a short, muscular, broad shouldered man, sprang to his feet.

"It is enough," he exclaimed. "The white man tells the truth."

"But how could you know that I speak the truth?" Clinton asked in some perplexity. "We have come more than two hundred miles since we left the Crocodile King. No one has passed us going upstream."

Smiling, the old chief pointed to a small signal drum that lay nearby. Then with both hands he went through the pantomime of playing upon it.

"He means," said Clinton in astonishment, "that the drum that the Crocodile King stole from his people has told him. Think of it! Two hundred miles!"

"By relay," said Curlie. "I heard them talking in the night."

The old chief seized Dave's calling stick and began reading the signs aloud.

"This too tells him much," said Clinton.

"But how did the cane come to my young companion?" Clinton asked of the chief.

The chief's answer was a shrug. Evidently

he did not know. All he could say was that it came from far down the river where such things are made, and that it told a good story.

"And you," he added, addressing the three, "may remain in my land as long as this cane and the drum speak the truth."

"Which will be a long, long time," Clinton bowed. "We are your brothers."

"Your brother," the chief repeated after him.

"Is it not strange?" Clinton said to Dave in a quiet tone as they made their way back to their kit by the river bank. "You saved a small boy. You won the gratitude of an old man. In a manner unknown to us, but certainly at much pains and labor, he told his people two hundred miles away about your brave deed, and much more about us. Perhaps he saved our lives."

"But think!" said Curlie. "What a perfect telegraph system. No wires to be torn down. No static there. The message must go through, and it does."

CHAPTER XIV

PASSING IN THE SHADOWS

Suddenly now the flame of hope leaped high. The dread Tucana warriors had become their friends. And such warriors as they were! Never before had the boys seen men so strongly built and so agile. Their skill with bow and arrow was marvelous. Their prowess in hunting brought words of loudest praise from Clinton, the veteran traveler. They shot fish in the stream with bow and arrow. They harpooned eight hundred pound manatees at the bottom of deep pools, and rode after them in light canoes until, exhausted, they came to the surface and were killed with lances. They drove their darts into the fierce heart of the dreaded jaguar.

Now for the first time Clinton showed a keen interest in matters other than the day's labor. With note book and pencil he followed the natives about. In this note book went peculiar jottings. When it was filled a fresh one was drawn from his pack, then another and yet another.

The splendid strength of the Tucana men served them well. In payment for axe heads and knives, strings of beads and calico, they cut down great trees and with skill that was surprising hewed out planks of rosewood and mahogany that in centers of civilization would have been worth a king's ransom. These were for Clinton's boat. Since the natives had only small boats, a large one must be built.

And such a boat it should be! Thirty feet long, ten feet wide, with a mahogany deck and a waterproof palm thatched canopy over the back half, it should be such a craft as the Queen of Sheba must have traveled in thousands of years ago.

How were they to man the boat? They

would have a crew of warriors, the chief promised. And here was a native whose word was good as gold; a prince in the wilderness.

So a week passed. A little way up a narrow creek the new boat, smelling of fresh cut mahogany, tamarind and rosewood, lay nearly completed.

It was in the early evening that the three voyagers and the chief lay upon a bed of moss close to the river's brink.

Suddenly Clinton removed the palm leaf covering of some object he had carried under his arm.

"Ah!" exclaimed the chief as he looked. It was the farinha grater, set with diamonds.

"I have seen," said the chief. Then, without being asked to do so, he smoothed out a spot on the ground and after drawing a crude map, planted his right forefinger on a certain spot.

Then he went through a strange pantomime. After seeming to remove his head from his shoulders, he went through the motions of

carving it in a strange manner with his machete. At the same time he was talking rapidly.

"He tells me," said Clinton with a dubious smile, "that the people who make such farinha graters live far up the right fork of this stream; that they are head hunters; that they preserve the heads of their enemies and dry them in such a manner that their entire features are preserved, though the head is no larger than a woman's fist. He says he will not go there."

"Ugh!" shuddered Curlie. "Neither will I!"

"We must remember," said Clinton, "that if distance lends enchantment to the view, it also lends horror. We are now among the dread Tucana, and behold, they are our friends."

"But look," said Dave, who was endowed with particularly keen eyes, "isn't that a boat gliding along the far bank?"

The chief too had been looking. Presently he held up two fingers. "Two boats."

"Where do they come from?" asked Clinton.

"They are from far down the river," said the chief. "There are six men in each boat. They go upriver to gather rubber, perhaps. They cling to yonder shadows because they fear the Tucana." He laughed a short laugh.

"Well they may fear," he said, rising and striding up and down, "if they are bad white men. For we—we are the Tucana. This is our land. And I—I am Chief of the Tucana!" He smote his bare breast.

"But they have gone for rubber," he added. "And when they take it down the river that old murderer, the Crocodile King, will take it from them."

"See!" exclaimed Dave. "There come two others. Those are larger. They carry more men."

A curious look, a look of combined rage and cunning, overspread the chief's face.

"Those men," he said slowly, "are the Crocodile King's men. They are heavily

armed. Now surely there will be trouble for someone."

This last revelation gave the three voyagers food for thought. So the King of the Black River had better boats and stronger men than he had furnished to them. Why had he held them back? Had the news of the discovery of white gold up this river somehow leaked out? Were the king's men off on the same mission as were the three voyagers, with an added purpose of robbing and looting others? Would there be other boats? Many other boats? The discovery of white gold in this money-hungry land was like the discovery of yellow gold in the Klondike. They could know the answer to none of this. One resolution they did make before they climbed into their hammocks that night: the work on the new boat should be completed at once, and they would be away.

The true nature and use of the white gold of the Amazon was no longer a mystery to the boys. Clinton had told them much about it.

Yet they were none the less eager to continue the search.

White gold is much like black gold, only it is much more valuable. "Black gold" is rubber. "White gold" is balata, the sap of the bark of a certain hardwood tree. It is used in making belts for driving machinery. It does not grow hard, smooth and slippery as rubber does.

"That's what Clinton meant when he told us we might make the wheels of American industry turn more smoothly," Dave said to Curlie after one of the explorer's talks.

"It's true, too," Curlie said thoughtfully. "It's strange what an influence two or three persons in the heart of a jungle may have on the life of a great nation. If we find an immense forest of balata bearing trees, if the white gold is gathered and shipped to America, then the very thing that Clinton spoke of will happen."

"Yes," agreed Dave, "but we must have the first helping. Every discoverer, inventor and

explorer is entitled to the first fruits of his labor."

Curlie thought of the canoes that had gone upstream and wondered a great wonder.

CHAPTER XV

CLINTON'S SECRET

For a long time after they returned to camp, each of the voyagers was busy with his own thoughts. That the passage of these boats up the river might interfere with their plans they knew quite well. Here was food for serious thought.

It was Clinton who at last broke the silence.

"I shall be sorry," he said in a low tone, "if our plans for gathering balata are interfered with.

"Not," he hurried to add, "that it will make a great difference to me. But I shall be sorry for you."

"Oh we—"

Clinton interrupted Dave, who started to speak. "I suppose you boys have wondered what has brought me into this wilderness?"

The two boys sat up, all attention. Was a secret about to be revealed? It seemed so.

"There's no great mystery about it," he went on as if reading their thoughts. "You may have noticed that down here every white man, no matter how ragged and run down at the heel he may be, is the son of a millionaire, or an English lord. If not this, then he is a representative of a great company organized for the exploiting of this vastly rich land, or a scientist delving into its secrets.

"Of course, ninety-nine out of a hundred are pure romancers; they are not what they claim to be at all. Naturally, then, those who are more or less genuine are slow to make their claims for recognition lest they be classed with the fakes and romancers.

"I," he said modestly, "am a curator of a great museum in Chicago. My business is that of observing and recording the actions of

primitive man, and gathering samples of their handicraft."

"So—so that's it!" Dave breathed.

"You can well imagine," the newly discovered scientist went on, "what an opportunity our present position affords me. Nowhere in the world, perhaps, is there better opportunity for studying the ways of a so-called savage race. Because of their fierce daring and their hatred of the aggressive and brutal whites who operated in this land, these people have remained in isolation.

"They are, you see, communist. A hundred people work together to erect a great dwelling. Then all eat and sleep within. Their hearthfire is a common coal fire in the center of the house, used by all. Their sleeping quarters are divided only by imaginary lines. Their home is like a great Pullman sleeping car without curtains.

"There are men in our country who claim that this state of communism is the ideal state for all human beings. It is not for the scien-

tist to decide whether it is or not. His task is to record faithfully what he observes. This is my work here. As we journey farther up we will find other tribes and perhaps other forms of government."

"I think," he said a little later, "that we will not be disappointed in finding the white gold we seek. Only yesterday I showed a small balata yielding tree to the chief, and he assured me that he knew of the existence of a forest where these trees grew in abundance.

"We will get the balata. But there, unless I judge amiss, our real problem will begin. That crafty Crocodile King has sent his armed crews upriver, not so much to gather balata themselves as to rob others once their work is done."

"And if we succeed in escaping them," said Curlie, "there is still the old King himself and the treacherous whirlpool to pass."

"But we will outwit him!" exclaimed Dave, leaping to his feet and pacing backward and forward. "If necessary we will fight him. We

have rifles, ammunition, blowguns, poison darts, and men, plenty of men, the old king's enemies at that!"

"If possible we must avoid bloodshed," Clinton's voice was low. "There is such a thing as purchasing wealth at too great a price. That has happened many a time up here at the back of beyond." Rising, he went to his hammock.

"If we are to conduct our little investigation downriver," Curlie said to his pal a few minutes later, "we must be about it very soon. The boat will be ready to take to the water in a day or two. Then we will be leaving this place for points beyond."

"To-morrow evening," said Dave, "we will borrow a small war canoe and float down in the shadows. The moon will be up to guide us on the return journey."

After that, in silence they prepared for sleep. And the great black river swept on, telling nothing of that which was to come.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MYSTERIOUS BOAT

Next day just before sunset a narrow dug-out built like a sportsman's canoe glided down the creek, then after executing a graceful curve, shot down the river. Sitting erect, wielding native paddles fore and aft sat the two white boys.

For a time they glided downstream at the very center of the broad river where the current was strongest.

When a half hour had passed and dark shadows began to obscure the golden glimmer of the sunset, they swung in close to the right bank to drift slowly onward.

They had rounded a curve when Dave said in a low, vibrant tone:

"There! There it is! I remember that leaning mangrove tree."

At that, with a deft stroke he brought the canoe about and sent it gliding among the overhanging branches of the red mangrove. Here they were as completely hidden as they would have been had the river swallowed them up, for the down-dropping branches, extending beneath the surface of the water, draw moisture to nourish the spreading branches above.

Gripping the branches to prevent the gentle current from carrying them forward, they sat there, nerves tense, listening, watching. A little before them on the bank was the beginning of a well defined trail. At the left the broad river swept on toward the sea.

Over the river and jungle hung the Sabbath-like hush of twilight. Only now and then did they catch the puh-puh-puh of a far away jaguar or the long drawn flute-like note of some bird of unknown species.

So the moments passed. So they watched and listened. Night was falling swiftly, as

tropical nights will, when Dave, turning quickly in his seat, cupped a hand to his ear.

From across the river had come a sound. That the sound was not the expected one was shown by the puzzled look on his face.

With one long finger he pointed across the black expanse. Then with strong, noiseless strokes he drove the canoe out of the mass of branches into the deepening shadows.

The sound which had puzzled him was a loud purring. To their vast surprise, they saw, clearly outlined against the dark foliage of the opposite shore, a power schooner.

"Flat bottom, good lines. Built for the purpose. And her power? Who can say? Some new form of motor. Adequate at least." These were Dave's comments. Dave was a mechanic by nature, and no mean boatman.

Curlie's interest, always focused on the human side, had been completely absorbed by the two figures in the boat.

One, a tall man, rather angular, well

dressed, a clean cut face and gray mustache, seemed a high class Britisher.

At the back, half hidden by a long coat of some light stuff, face invisible, rode a slight motionless figure.

"Might be a woman, a grown girl or a boy," was Curlie's mental comment. His first instinct was to let out a shout, to tempt that mysterious person to turn about. Instantly he thought of that other thing, the thing that had brought them down the river.

"'Twon't do," he told himself.

The next moment the mysterious motorboat rounded the curve and was lost from sight.

"Well," he whispered, turning to his astonished companion, "what do you think? Balata hunters?"

"I doubt it. Too much class."

"Whoever they are," he added a moment later, "we are likely to see them again."

"Why?"

"They'll be coming down soon."

"Why?"

"Any motor craft calls for fuel, coal, oil, gasoline, something. They can't carry much. When it's gone, where will they get more?"

"That's right. Not a drop of anything. Not a—"

"Whist!" Dave touched his arm for silence. There had come a sound, this time from the land. Resembling a bird's call, it almost seemed a part of the wild life of the jungle, but not quite.

"Come on," Dave's whisper was vibrant with emotion as, having tied the canoe securely to a mangrove root, he seized his rifle and moved stealthily down the beaten trail.

CHAPTER XVII

THE TREE SPIRIT

That trail was the one they had followed the night of their experience with the "singing monkey" who also played the violin.

They had come on a tour of investigation. Now, to their great joy, they caught the first strange notes of the "singing monkey's" concert.

"It's the most curious thing I ever heard of," said Dave, as they came to a breathless halt.

"Fairly haunting. Spooky."

Again there came that plaintive wail.

"Like some unknown night bird," said Dave.

"Only it isn't."

"What do you think? Can't be a native."

"Might be. Probably white."

"But why, in a tree?"

Together they pressed forward until the great black bulk of the spreading breadnut tree loomed against the sky just before them. There, deep in the shadows they sank down upon the decaying trunk of a fallen tree.

At intervals the strange notes sounded out. As time passed, they lost their resemblance to a bird call, became more truly the notes of a man-made instrument of music.

Then, of a sudden, mellow, haunting, mysterious, there drifted out upon the air as before the notes of that Spanish love song. Three times, while the boys sat gripping their rifles tight, staring into the night, the tune was repeated.

Then of a sudden silence deep and vibrant fell upon the jungle.

"The—the red monkey will now pass the hat." Dave's tone was light, but his lips trembled with suppressed emotion. The joke fell flat. And still there came no sound.

"Have a mind to risk a shot just to break this dead hush," whispered Dave.

"No—no!" Curlie gripped his hand. "This may be a plot. There may be many men. They may be creeping upon us."

As if in answer to this suggestion, there came the sound of a voice. Someone from the heart of the breadnut tree was speaking. The tone he used was wooing, persuasive, enticing, yet the boys understood never a word. The language was strange to them. They could only sit and stare into the dark.

"Come on," said Curlie, "let's get out of here. I've had enough."

Rising, they went tiptoeing down the moss carpeted aisle of the forest.

That this night's work had not been entirely lost, Curlie was to learn long weeks after and under the most unusual of circumstances.

Next day they related their experience to Clinton. Greatly surprised, he could not throw any light on the subject.

"If it were not that we are to leave in the morning," he said thoughtfully, "and that every moment will be needed for packing up and for launching the boat, I would go up there with you and we would see what we should see.

"I'll tell the chief about it. Perhaps he can explain."

"That. Oh, that." The chief's face expanded into a broad smile when he had been told of the mysterious occurrence. "That is no one at all."

"No one, no one at all!" the boys exclaimed together in amazement. "But we heard it."

"It is only a spirit," said the chief, "the spirit of a good and great white man who died not long ago up there." He pointed up the river. "His spirit has returned to live in that tree. He also has presents. We do not take them. If you accept presents from spirits you too will become a spirit. That is not good. Instead you must give presents. We have left presents for this spirit.

"This spirit talks, you say?" the chief went on. "Ah, yes, he talks in our language. Some hunters have heard. It is not good to hear. These hunters have stopped their ears and run away. Our hunters, they hunt no more in that forest. It is better so. For what do you say if one by chance shoots an arrow through a spirit? Ah, then there is great trouble. Very great trouble."

So this was all the chief could tell them. When they had thought it over they agreed that it was not much.

The "very great and good white man" who lived up the river they were to hear again. And, living or dead, he was to play no inconsiderable part in their lives.

So the day passed. The boat was launched and loaded, ready for the morning. Then they gathered in the moonlight before the chief's great bamboo home for one wild dance to celebrate their departure.

They were weird affairs, these native dances in the moonlight. The white boys' power to

add considerably to the musical end of it increased their popularity. Curlie had his saxophone. Dave had brought with him the makings of a banjo, strings and metal part. By steaming a tough strip of sapodilla wood, forming it into a circle and binding over it the dried skin of a wild pig, he made a head. To this he attached a handle of curly mahogany, added his strings, and the thing was done.

The native chants, mingled with hoarse tom-tom beats and shrill pipes of reed flutes, were weird and fantastic. It is much to the credit of the young white musicians that they were able to catch the spirit, the wild rhythmic cadence of it all, to heighten and enrich it by the mellow roar of saxophone and the dull tum-tum-tum of banjo.

In the early evening the natives danced singly, but as the night drew on the dance grew wilder. Like sprites whirling in the shadowy moonlight they danced in pairs, in

threes, whole groups together, round and round.

Entranced with this new form of music, the true South American Blues, they danced on and on till the stars began to fade.

Then the musicians were glad enough to lay aside their instruments for a few winks of sleep.

"Good work, boys!" Clinton exclaimed, patting them on the back, "that will take us far."

And it did.

CHAPTER XVIII

A STRANGE NEW GUN

Packing time found Curlie's share of the kit enriched by two objects, a blowgun and a quiver of poison darts.

Two days before the time set for departure he had persuaded Teserie, one of the chief's warriors, to make the blowgun for him.

Every step in the process of this peculiar weapon interested him. Each was indelibly impressed upon his mind. Well for him that this was true, for the time was to come when the knowledge served him well.

Selecting two strips of the hardest wood obtainable, called by the warrior "Chanta," he shaped them to his purpose. When done they were an inch thick, one and a half inches wide

and eight feet in length. Down the center of each ran a groove one-quarter inch deep and one-half inch wide.

These two strips were placed face to face and bound tightly here and there with bark. This left a square wood pipe with a hole a half inch in diameter running through it from end to end.

When the parts had been lightly bound together the sharp corners were smoothed away. The "gun" was then bound tightly from end to end with green bark, then sealed with black bee's wax. The process of binding and waxing was repeated. Then the "gun" was ready for the final polishing of the inside bore. The tube was strung on a cord. To the cord were fastened bits of cotton. The cotton was soaked in water and sprinkled with sand. Then the "gun" was drawn backward and forward along this crude polisher, back and forth tirelessly for ten long hours.

When this time had elapsed and Curlie looked down the barrel of this much prized

weapon, he found the inner surface as shiny as the inside of a new rifle.

After this a mouthpiece of mahogany was fitted to one end of the tube. Only a puff of air from the human lungs is needed to fire this "gun."

Darts made of bamboo were provided. From the forest the warrior gathered a basket full of inner bark from a certain vine. Placing this in a kettle of water together with three great spiders and the tooth of a snake, he made a fire under it, and stirring it until it was like thick chocolate he poured it off in sections of cane stalk.

Into one of these sections he thrust the points of many darts. These he allowed to dry in the sun.

When all was done, seizing the gun and a dart he looked about for some living mark. Spying a kinkajou, a night prowler, sleeping in the crotch of a tree, he inserted a dart in the tube, put his lips to the mouthpiece, squinted down the blowgun, then extending

his cheeks, gave a short, sharp puff. A half minute later the unhappy kinkajou came to the earth with a loud plop. He was stone dead.

Curlie shuddered. What strange magic this!

"There," said the warrior, handing him the newly made weapon, the quiver of darts and two carefully sealed tubes of poison, "you have seen how deadly it is. I have boiled it with three spiders and a snake's tooth. I have said magic words over it. It will not fail you. Guard it well. With these tubes and this blowgun you need never starve, for, while the poison kills the wild creature, the meat of that wild thing is always safe for the hunter to eat."

Curlie wondered at this, but he accepted the words as truth. Indeed, had he not many times in his short stay here seen the natives dining happily on wild deer, pig and turkey killed by the poison darts of a blowgun?

Pleased as a small boy with his first sling-shot, Curlie went about shooting every palm tree within sight. When, however, he had

missed four times and had, in consequence, lost four darts in the underbrush, when he had come within a very narrow margin of accidentally shooting a small boy who suddenly appeared from nowhere, he resolved to postpone further practice until he had made a bundle of unpoisoned needles and had provided a suitable target.

CHAPTER XIX

A SPEAR FINDS ITS MARK

It was a brave day when the *Red Rover,* as Dave christened their boat, took to the water.

"Perfect!" was Clinton's comment as he studied her from every angle. "Light enough for convenience, large enough for service and beautiful enough with her red mahogany sides to please a princess, she's a thing of joy forever."

"And she don't leak," said Dave. "Not a drop."

When the Tucana warriors saw the trade goods, knives, spoons, axes, machetes, calico and beads which were to be paid for successful "white gold" hunting, they all wished to

accompany the upriver expedition. To this the chief, Taraque, would not consent.

"Is not that old rascal, the Crocodile King, still down the river?" he asked with a dramatic fling of his hands. "Are not our homes and our children to be protected? I will go and thirty men with me. That is all."

How he decided which warriors should go, the voyagers did not discover. Enough that at the appointed hour thirty men stood in readiness to go.

Had an enemy of the chief witnessed the departure he must surely have rushed through the jungle to tell his companions that Taraque was planning an attack. Four war canoes surrounded the *Red Rover*. Every boat bristled with bows and arrows and spears and blowguns. Like the Pilgrims of old when they ventured into the wilderness, these people must go prepared for war. It was not to be forgotten that the Crocodile King's best men were up river. And who could tell which of the

tribes dwelling in those upper fastnesses might come down upon them?

Days of travel followed, strange, beautiful, mysterious, fascinating days of hard labor. All day they struggled with oars and poles against the swift river current. At times they made good progress, twenty miles in a single day. At others they worked for hours to pass a seething, swirling, boiling caldron of rapids that the chief assured them the River God had set there to hinder their progress.

There were times when the river bank on either side was steep and high; others when it sloped away like a New England hillside pasture. Everywhere the palms and ferns painted such vivid panoramas of gold and green as one sometimes dreams of in his slumbers.

Game was plentiful. Little wild deer, young tapir, wild turkey, monkey, turtle and turtle's eggs were on the daily bill of fare.

"It's like one gorgeous picnic excursion," Dave said to Curlie.

"Yes. I have to pinch myself to make it seem real."

"Get real all of a sudden, I suppose."

It did. Just at sunset, as they were skirting the shore in search of a suitable campsite, a heavy flint pointed spear, seeming to dart away from the very heart of the setting sun, came shooting through the air to strike a handsome young warrior squarely in the chest. With such force was it thrown that the point passed through his body. Without a sound he fell from his place in a war canoe into the water. He sank at once and was seen no more.

The half hour that followed will never be forgotten. Not a word was said. Like the silent flight of wild ducks, the row of canoes headed for the very center of the stream, then moved straight on, up and up and up until darkness hid all. Black water, gray banks, green forests all were lost in night.

Coming upon a sandbar in midstream, they

pulled up their canoes to eat a cold supper and retire for the night without a light.

"Pretty bad," Dave ventured to speak to the chief at last.

"That spear," said the old chief, "one Crocodile King's spear."

His tone told plainer than words that this day the cowardly act of a king's man had set that moving in the heart of a great chief which would not be stilled until all had been repaid.

Next morning, hugging the right bank, they came opposite to one of the Crocodile King's canoes. It was manned by fifteen warriors.

Gripping his rifle, Dave awaited some word from the chief.

A moment passed, and no word came. The suspense became all but unbearable. Two minutes, three, four, five minutes went on into eternity. Still they paddled straight on upstream. A sudden bend in the river hid them from the hated enemy.

"Here we will pause and prepare for attack," the boy thought.

But no, in utter silence they moved straight on.

A half mile farther up, at the chief's direction they chose the right of two courses where the river forked. Evening found them thirty miles from the scene of the previous day's tragedy.

Seeing the questioning look in Dave's eyes, the chief spoke.

"There is a time," his smile was grim, "a time to work and a time to fight. Today we go to gather balata. Is it not so? The time will come when we will fight. Then let the old Crocodile beware!"

Two days later, they found themselves at the heart of a great forest. Standing among the tamarind, sapodilla and mahogany trees were strange trees. Here, there, everywhere, far as one could see, they were found.

"These," said Clinton, and there was an air of triumph in his tone, "are the trees that

bear white gold. See how they stand! Since the day of creation this forest has not been touched by the hand of a man."

"Dave," said Curlie, gripping his companion's hand hard, "We have arrived! Here is white gold. We shall win."

CHAPTER XX

HIS QUEST FOR A GOLDEN TROPHY

In the jungle, when there is work to do, time flies swiftly. It was so with the three voyagers and their Indian crew of balata gatherers.

A month passed in peace. No sign of the dwarf brown men, who are supposed from time to time to go prowling through this far land, was seen.

Each day naked black men, performing miraculous feats of climbing, tapped fresh trees. Each evening, laden with canvas sacks filled with white sap, they came marching in. Far into the night the fire beneath the boiling down kettle burned merrily. Every morning a few large heavy white balls were added

to the ever growing pile of "white gold" beneath the palm thatched shelter.

The two boys liked it. Born of working parents, they reveled in creative toil. To them, no moments were quite equal to those spent before the evening campfire after the day's work was done. Then, with the Crocodile King and all else forgotten, they talked of the journeys they would take, of the months of university study they would enjoy because of the increasing pile of white balls in the shelter close by.

By the time four weeks had passed, Curlie had become quite expert in the use of the blowgun. Two wild pigs, a young tapir, a small manatee and numbers of birds resembling partridges had fallen into his hand.

His blowgun by this time was a thing of beauty and great joy. Every day the native craftsman strung it along a cord and added half an hour's work to the finishing of the bore. The outside too was rubbed, beaten

and polished until it shone like a bit of black steel.

Two jungle prizes had never felt the sting of his darts—wild turkey and jaguar.

"If only I could kill a jaguar!" he said to Dave. "To take that golden trophy home, to say, 'This I killed with a blowgun'—that would be glory indeed." So, during his leisure hours he haunted the fastnesses of the jungle.

One evening when the shadows were lengthening he crept down a narrow animal trail to at last climb a rocky knoll and come down on the other side.

At the lower side he paused to listen.

The sound that came to his ear set every nerve vibrating.

"Turkeys," he thought half aloud, "Turkeys going to roost."

"Strange how like a farmyard sound it is. If I did not know the thing was impossible I'd expect to part the branches and see a barn loom in the distance.

"But now—" he drew a long breath and crept forward in the gathering twilight.

The distance was greater than he had supposed. In the vast silence of the jungle sound travels far.

The last yellow glow of twilight was fading when, with a sudden intake of breath he came to an abrupt halt. The sight that met his eyes was one to delight a sportsman's heart. Directly before him, as if cut from black paper and set against a fast fading sky, were seven plump wild turkeys.

Their backs were to him. He had not been seen. With trembling fingers he inserted a dart. Then, taking a firm grip on his nerves, he lifted the blowgun to his lips, took steady aim, emitted a silent puff, then lowered to load again.

Had he missed? For a moment he would not know. Meanwhile there were other turkeys. He had heard of the American Indian snaring a whole roosting flock of partridges, one at a time. Why might he not have seven

turkeys? Darts were silent things. Turkeys are not likely to be disturbed by a vanishing comrade.

A second dart and a third had flown before a turkey, with a silence that was startling, toppled from his place to fall upon a deep bed of moss.

The second, third and fourth bird had fallen; the boy was breathing hard in his excitement, when he saw that which brought beads of perspiration to the tip of his nose.

Two gleaming eyes had appeared in the dark space near the ground, beyond the birds.

"A—a jaguar—a big, six foot golden cat!" was his startled thought.

At once his mind was in a whirl. The jaguar had seen the birds. They were his choicest food. If the boy remained, would the jaguar fight?

"Four turkeys and a jaguar in a single night!" The boy was living in the immediate future. "What a triumph!"

He felt for the small automatic and the

long hunting knife he always carried. Finding them safe and at hand, he dared to risk it.

Gripping his blowgun tight to steady his tense nerves, he lifted it, like a man who takes poison, then sped his dart.

That his aim had been true was proven by the sudden pawing leap of the jaguar.

"Paw away," he thought excitedly. "You will break the shaft. You can't dislodge the point."

To his great surprise a moment later he saw the great cat, apparently quite unharmed, move closer to the silent roosting turkeys.

"Poison don't work. Try again."

This time the jaguar's golden flank, which was turned toward him, received the dart.

This time the creature did not so much as flinch. Crouching low, he appeared about to spring.

With sudden consternation the boy realized that only two leaps of the great cat would be required to reach him.

"What if he is stalking me!"

Thrown into a panic, discarding his blow-gun, he drew his automatic and fired point blank at the jaguar.

The pandemonium that ensued was unnerving. The bang-bang of the gun was mingled with the flutter and squawk of turkeys and one long drawn howl of the great cat.

Then silence, deep and ominous hung over the jungle. The turkeys had flown. The jaguar was gone. The boy was left with his thoughts and four dead turkeys.

Had he called it a night, and crept home with the turkeys on his back, he would have done well. He did not. A great golden jaguar, an unusually large member of his specie, was somewhere near in the jungle. The barbs of two poison arrows had entered his body. It was more than probable that he had been severely wounded as well.

"Won't last long. May be dead now. Have a look," the boy told himself as, with blow-

gun slung across his back, the reloaded automatic in one hand and a flashlight in the other, he pressed slowly forward into the bush.

"Blood," he murmured a moment later. "I hit him. Good! That makes a trail."

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRAIL OF BLOOD

"There! And there!" Curlie followed the trail of blood. Here a drop on a leaf. There a splotch against a tree. There a red bit of moss. He saw and followed on. Ever hoping to catch the golden gleam of the jaguar's coat, now losing the trail, now picking it up again, he struggled on through a jungle thick with brush and creeping vines until, with a suddenness that was startling, he found himself squarely up against a giant tree.

The tree's roots, rising four feet above his head and spreading far, both left and right, appeared to wall him in. Just before him, against the ragged bark he saw that which told a story. Freshly torn bark, spots of red,

told that the jaguar had gone up that tree.

Here was a new problem. The tree would not be difficult to climb. Three huge branches, trees in themselves, hung close to the ground. The lower of these had touched earth and, as tropical branches will, had taken root there.

"Be easy enough," he told himself. "But after all—"

He recalled now for the first time what Taraque had told him about the jaguar.

"Of all animals he is the hardest to kill. His skin is thick. Like his teeth and claws, his blood is strong. Sometimes a devil enters his heart. Then he cannot be killed at all."

"He may not die," he told himself. "He may be waiting for me up there. Trees are his home, not mine. I will not risk it."

Taking safety-first counsel, he sat down a little way from the tree to wait.

"He may die. Then he may fall from the tree." he told himself.

So he sat there in silence. As he waited

strange thoughts passed through his mind. That great tree with its broad spreading roots reminded him of another, the tree of the "singing monkey".

"Wonder if I will ever hear that strange music again," he thought to himself. "Who could it have been? Why were they there? The old chief has heard them. His talk of a white man's spirit is nonsense. But who could it have been?"

Had he been with Dave at that moment, he might have been given some proof that at least a great white man's spirit had departed from his body in this very region not so long before. Not knowing this, he wondered on until, chilled by the night air, wearied by the day's labor and the night's tramp, he found his head nodding in sleep.

"Won't do!" he told himself. "Must stay awake."

"May as well go back," he added a moment later.

Was it that being so nearly asleep his

senses were benumbed, or had the day been too long? Whatever it may have been, he was not quite himself for, as he started back through the jungle he took too precipitate a course. He had not gone ten yards when, tripping over a vine, he went sprawling.

Cutting a yellow circle through the air, his flashlight struck something solid, a tree or a log, and blinked out.

"Here's a pretty mess!" he exclaimed, struggling to his feet and giving himself a vigorous shake. "In the heart of the jungle without a light. Boo! How dark it is!"

It *was* dark. Not one moonbeam was able to struggle through the thick canopy of tree-tops that met above him.

"The heavens are roofed in darkness," he said to himself. "God hides his face."

For a time, on hands and knees, fearing every moment that he might touch a snake in the dark, he felt among the ferns and rotting logs for the flashlight.

"What's the use?" he exclaimed at last.

"Lamp is gone. Haven't another. 'Twouldn't light anyway."

Groping his way to a decaying log, he sat down.

"I've been as big a fool as the dog that dropped a fine piece of meat to grab for its reflection in the water," he grumbled to himself. "Had four fine turkeys and tried for a jaguar skin. Now, even though I wait till morning, which I must, I may not find my turkeys."

At that, he had little notion of the plight he was in.

CHAPTER XXII

THE MYSTERY MAN OF THE JUNGLE

Clinton, who had turned over the major part of responsibility connected with balata gathering to his two young companions and the chief, had been taking every advantage offered in this his greatest opportunity for studying primitive life. Gradually, as the native reserve was broken down, he learned the meaning of many little ceremonies connected with their everyday life, and of the great seasonal and periodic festivals.

Their customs in time of war, their beliefs regarding death, the future life and the great beyond, their tribal history in so far as there was any, became the daily subject of conversation.

When these had been well nigh exhausted, Taraque began discussing the manners and customs of "those strange dwarf people who live but a half day's journey up yonder."

"For a long time, years and years," he would say, "there lived among these people a white man, same as you," he would stroke his chin to indicate the presence of a beard, "only taller, much taller and not so — so gross." Then he would laugh.

As the days passed he had enlarged upon this story. "This white man," he said, "built him a house of mahogany logs with a floor of hardwood that shone like a pool of still water in the sun.

"He was good to those dwarf people. He healed them and drove away their evil spirits. He taught them how to grow potatoes and pineapples in rows and bananas in little fields. But now," he would sigh, "he is dead. I have heard it. The drums, the carved sticks have

told me. And all those little dwarf people mourn, for he was very good.

"They put him in the earth as he had told them to do. But all that he had, his rifles, his papers, his kettles, his curious things that no one understands, they are still in the great house of logs. No one dares disturb them, for these little people love him still. He was very kind and good.

"And besides," he would add in a voice that was almost a whisper as he turned to Dave, "you know it, for you have heard, his spirit comes back to talk and to make music in the treetops.

"Long ago," the chief would continue, "there were bad times on this river. These little dwarf men poisoned those who came to their land, poisoned them with fish liver. They can smell like a dog and hunt game with their noses. If you had been here, then they would smell you out and put poison in your soup at night.

"And now," he sighed, "now they are good. He has made them so, this very great white man. And now, as you know, he is dead.

"It is but a short way. We go when the sun is high. We get there when the sun is low. If you wish we will go, and will return by the moon."

For some time Clinton thought of this white man and his pygmy friends as the fanciful dream of a wild man whose mind was filled with all manner of stories about spirits and devils. But as the days passed, as it was told over and over with but slight variations, he became convinced that at least upriver there must dwell a friendly people quite unlike those with whom he now associated.

"That being the case, why shouldn't we visit them?" he said one day.

"Why not?" said Dave, who was always ready for an adventure and who of late had become an ardent pupil of the anthropologist.

So it happened that the very day on which

Curlie went turkey hunting, Clinton, Dave and the chief, together with a handful of warriors, had set off upstream in a native canoe, with the intention of visiting the land of the dwarfs.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GHOST MAN'S VIOLIN

By great good fortune they came, just before sunset, upon one of the dwarfs hunting manatee in a canoe. At first, apparently very much frightened, he started to paddle swiftly away.

When Taraque shouted a few words after him, he turned about. Then, with a look of great surprise and joy on his face, came swiftly toward them.

A half hour later Dave thrilled for a second time at sound of those magic words: *"Hath thia pure Kariwa,* Welcome to the white man."

This time it was shouted in chorus by

some forty warriors so short of stature that they seemed a midget army.

Imagine the surprise of Clinton and Dave when, as they were led to the bamboo hut of the chief of dwarfs, they found themselves passing a fair sized house built of mahogany logs.

"Kariwa—white man," said the chief, striking the wall with his hand.

At once Dave found his mind awhirl with speculations. What of this new discovery? This mysterious closed cabin? It proved that at least part of Taraque's story was true. Was the remainder true also? Had a white man lived there? Was this house stocked with the treasures, the collected trophies of a lifetime? If so, what sort of man could he have been; a recluse, a missionary? What had been his interests, what his adventures in this land at the back of beyond? Here was subject for surmise and conjecture. Little time for thinking of it now, however. If the good will of the pygmy tribe were to be pre-

served, their homes must first be visited. There must be feasting and dancing. He had brought his banjo along. He wondered how they would take to such music.

He shuddered a little as he took the first mouthful of food from a crude clay dish. He had not forgotten that these curious little people had been accustomed, in years gone by, to mix poison with their broth when strangers were about.

The food he found unusually good. There were traces of white man's training in the manner in which it was prepared and served.

Their dance, too, held something of indescribable refinement in it. Strangely enough, when Dave tuned his banjo and began strumming its strings the native drummers dropped their sticks and gave him the field.

"Something queer about that," he told himself. "It is as if this thing had happened before, perhaps many, many times."

When at last the dance was over and the dwarf chief agreed to go with them to visit

the white man's house, Dave found himself walking on tiptoes as if he were entering a land of great magic.

It was now quite dark. An aged, wizen-faced dwarf preceded them with a torch. As he reached the door of the mysterious cabin, he paused to murmur some strange incantation, then lifting the latch, he led on.

Dave, who was in the lead, took two steps within, then stood amazed. It was as if he had been taken back fifty years to the shores of Merry England. He had seen this room, or the exact counterpart of it in a play. It was the immaculate kitchen of a great English mansion.

There was the heavy table, there the broad open fireplace, the copper kettles and saucepans, the andirons, the curious pictures on the walls, the quaint, square window panes, the massive beamed ceiling. All was as perfect as it might well be.

"And the master will soon return from the hunt," he found himself saying aloud.

"He is dead." Was it a whisper, or had he dreamed it? He started. Once more he was in the tropical jungle.

"But what a cabin to find here!" he exclaimed.

Clinton did not answer. Having crossed to the table at the other side of the room, he had picked up a bulky letter that lay there. After brushing away the dust from the face of the envelope, he puzzled over it for a moment, then without the least hesitation, took out the neatly folded sheets and began to read.

Interest and amazement were registered on his face as, sinking into a chair, oblivious of all else, he read on and on.

As for Dave, he was busy examining the contents of the cabin.

There were two small beds and five chairs, all hand made by a master craftsman. In one corner was a bookcase and a few books, in another a cabinet of specimens. On one of the shelves of this cabinet he spied two native

farinha graters. It required but one glance to assure him that these had been carved and engraved by the same craftsman who had made the one Clinton carried with him.

"Set with diamonds." His heart skipped a beat. "Perhaps this is the very tribe. He may have known. Somewhere in this cabin untold treasures of diamonds may be hidden."

Even this discovery was forgotten when, of a sudden, he came upon an expensive and very old leather violin case. He fully expected to find the case empty, but the violin was there. Old and much used, it gave evidence of being a rare instrument.

Having at one time and another experimented with a violin, he tuned the strings and drew the bow across them. The effect was electrical. At once, as if charmed, the dwarfs stood like statues in their places.

Instantly the boy regretted this rashness. His knowledge of a violin was limited indeed.

"Turkey in the straw," he thought. "What do these savages know about music?"

At once the jiggety-jag of that ancient tune rang out through the jungle.

The natives listened in respectful silence. But the charm was quickly broken. The mysterious musician, whoever he might have been, had played better music. Even these savages sensed the difference. He thought of the Spanish love song coming from the tree-tops, and came near dropping his bow.

When he had finished a very old dwarf began to speak. He talked long and loudly with many facial contortions and much waving of the hands.

"What does he say?" asked Clinton who had just finished his perusal of the letter.

"He says," the chief's face was a study, "that this white man, who has gone to the spirit world, could make his people sing, shout, dance or sob at will with this, his singing box.

" 'Many, many times,' he says, 'these little people sit under the stars and listen. Many times they want to go kill, rob, destroy

their enemies. Many times this white man plays until their hearts melt within them.'"

"And now?" said Clinton thoughtfully.

"And now," said the chief, "he tells me what I have said before, his spirit returns to sing from the treetops. They do not rob, kill, destroy, for his spirit still sings of peace. I have told you before. It is true. Spirits in the treetops. Taraque always speaks the truth."

At that instant, a native by chance dropped his spear. Dave jumped so suddenly and so high that the ancient violin came near dropping from his hands.

"We must return to that place," Clinton said quietly as a little later their canoe glided downstream in the moonlight. There are some things in that cabin which we must bring away. The difficult part will be getting the dwarfs to give them up. That house is their temple. Everything within is sacred.

"Sacred to the memory of a man," he said musingly.

Half an hour of silence followed. They glided over blue-black water which seemed a sky filled with stars. A moon swam there too. In time the illusion became so complete that Dave found himself speeding through great dark chambers of space.

The illusion was rudely broken by a voice in his ear.

"That was a great thing to do." It was Clinton who spoke.

"Wha-w-who," the boy stammered, struggling to collect his thoughts.

"The thing that white man did up yonder. A very great thing.

"There are those of us," the man's voice took on a mellow rumble, "who go rushing about the earth gathering bugs, butterflies, orchids and facts. We hope to become immortal. Most of us don't succeed. Some write books, others paint pictures. The pictures fade, the books are forgotten.

"But this man, what does he do? He goes to live with a hundred naked savages—dwarfs

at that. Nothing could seem less important. Yet look, he influences them by his living. They influence others. The thing spreads. He may some day be forgotten, but his influence lives on forever. Forever! And forever is a long, long time.

"But he has done more," the scientist added a moment later, "much more. Yes, surely we must go back. But how to get the things without a rumpus, that's the bother."

Dave, who was now fully wakened from his dreams and filled with interest, would have asked many questions. Was this stranger truly dead, or did the natives merely believe him to be dead? What was in that letter on the table that had held Clinton's attention so long? What could there be in that cabin that could be worth risking a struggle to bring out? There was the violin. But what of that? There had been a great heap of packages. He had felt of these, had torn

the corner of one and found it filled with dried leaves.

As soon as they reached camp, he went to the tent in which he and Curlie slept. Expecting to catch the gentle steady breathing of his pal, he was startled by the silence. He put a hand on the cot. Curlie was not there.

"Two o'clock in the morning and Curlie not here." A feeling of suffocation nearly overcame him. Something terrible must have happened!

Clearing the open space at a bound, he entered Clinton's tent. "Where's Curlie?" he demanded.

"What? Is he not there?"

"He's gone."

The scientist's face grew sober. For a moment he said nothing. Then slowly:

"'Twon't be long till morning. We'll be up with the first light. See what we can do. He can't be far off."

Truth was, had they let out one loud shout an hour before it would have been

heard by Curlie. They had passed that close to him in the night. But they had not shouted. They had glided on down the river in silence.

"In the morning," Dave whispered as he prepared to grab three winks of sleep.

Strangely enough, at this very moment Curlie was saying to himself, "In the morning." Having climbed a large tree, he had found on one of its broad branches refuge from creeping and crawling things that haunt the jungle in the night. There, in cramped discomfort, not daring to fall asleep, yet scarcely able to resist the drowsy silence of night, he was watching the tardy hours of darkness creeping by.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MAD TAPIR

At the first faint suggestion of dawn, Curlie crept from his perch among the branches and dropped stiffly to the ground.

He spent some time in a vain search for some hint of trail that would lead him back to camp. Soft springy moss that sinks like a pillow of down beneath one's feet and springs at once to its place when one has passed, was everywhere. Not a trace was to be found.

He was on a ridge of land. "Only thing to do is to follow down until I come to a small stream, then trace that to the river. Take time, but be all right in the end," he told himself.

"Plague is," he scratched his head, "to decide which side of the ridge to take."

In the end, after a half hour of puzzling, he chose the right side; no reason for it at all. He just chose at random. Since he was without a single clue, there was no other way.

Noon found him on a fairly broad stream.

"Be on the river before night," he told himself cheerfully. "Hungry. What am I to eat?"

He chided himself for not making a more careful study of the vegetable foods the natives brought in. There was a fruit they fried, another that they beat up into a meal and baked. There was a melon-like fruit that might be eaten raw.

"And there are a hundred fruits and roots that are poison," he told himself. "Don't dare trust any of them."

In the end he succeeded in shooting two young parrots. After roasting these over a small fire, he found them not so bad.

All afternoon with the damp heat pressing

him down, with strange flies and gnats annoying him, he pressed on down-stream.

"It is hard," he told himself, "but in the end I will win. Serves me right. Fellow's a fool who goes into the jungle without blazing a trail."

True to his prediction, just before sunset his small stream joined a large river. But what river? His heart sank. This was not their river. The water of their stream was a greenish black. This one flowed on in a sluggish dull brown.

For the first time, he now realized the terrible truth. He was completely lost in a great jungle seventeen hundred miles up the Amazon. The inhabitants of this jungle were wild savages, head hunters likely as not, and haters of all white men.

He sat down limply on a log. After a time he examined his blowgun and counted the darts. Then he looked for his automatic. Another catastrophe. It was gone. Somehow he had lost it.

He unwrapped his single box of matches, then finding them quite dry, re-wrapped them in oiled cloth with elaborate care.

After that he sat there quietly watching the surface of the river turn from dull brown to a glorious maroon, to old ivory, to jet black, then fade from sight as darkness settled down upon it.

After that he sought out another great low spreading tree for a night's rest.

It was three days later that, cut, scratched, bitten, bleeding, with clothes in tatters, but still gripping his blowgun, he emerged upon the first man-made trail he had seen in all his hopeless wanderings.

"Thank God!" he murmured as he dropped upon a grassy spot where the sunlight, flickering through, dispelled the awful, perpetual half night of the jungle.

Weak from exhaustion and hunger, he lay sprawled in the sunlight for a long time. For thirty hours he had been without food. He had found no game, save small birds. His

hands were too shaky, his aim too poor to bring them down.

But what was this? Some sound had come from up the trail. Gripping his blowgun, he rolled silently in a mass of protecting ferns, then waited in breathless suspense. "Natives," he told himself. "Friendly or hostile? Spells life or death."

He was mistaken. As the intruder rounded a bend in the trail he came near laughing. A young tapir, striped like a zebra and with the most comical face he had seen on any animal, came nosing along the trail.

For a moment thoughts of all else were driven away by his interest in this new wild thing.

Soon enough hunger asserted itself. "Here," it seemed to say, "is a mark broad enough for even your clumsy aim. Do your bit."

With shaking hand he lifted his blowgun, set a dart, took aim, puffed, saw his dart find its mark, then waited in vain for results.

The strange creature did not so much as flinch.

"Try another." This time he put all his lungs into the shot.

The next moment the young tapir did a strange whirling tail spin, let out a sort of wild bleat and turned over on his back.

"Got him! Now I eat!" he cried.

But not so fast. Came the sound of a half ton of flesh and bone threshing through the jungle. Rearing and plunging, her sharp toes threatening sudden death, the mother of the tapir calf charged from her place of concealment.

Thanks to his great agility, Curlie escaped up a tree. In his haste, however, he was obliged to leave his only means of support, the blowgun, behind. With a sinking heart he saw it snapped squarely in two as the raging beast tramped upon it.

"Well," he thought more calmly after a time, "if that savage old cow consents to leave after a while, there will still be young

tapir meat to eat. And tonight, come what may, I sleep."

Sleep he did. Gorged with tender tapir steak roasted over the coals, he lay down to rest in the identical spot where he had discovered the sunlight shining through, to drop into the deep, deep slumber of one who, overcome by fatigue and loss of sleep, despairs of life and resigns himself to whatever fate may await him.

Instead of the bright glare of the sun, there was now the golden glow of the moon. Painting the forest with shadows black as ebony, it turned every stirring leaf into a living thing, and transformed white palm leaves into shimmering ghosts. But the boy, with head cushioned on his arm, slept on.

In the jungle all was not still. Down the path a tawny shape, gliding like a golden shadow, crept nearer and nearer. At last he stood in the patch of moonlight quite near to the sleeping boy. A quick scent, one leap,

a scream, the rending and tearing of terrible teeth and claws, then all would be over.

But he paused, this jaguar king of the jungle. He caught an unpleasant gliding sound. He leaped into the brush and was gone.

Again the jungle slept, but not for long. A short, sharp nosed wild pig, rooting about for some grub or tuber with which to satisfy his excessive appetite, moved within the golden circle.

"Onk—onk—onk," he grunted. The boy did not hear.

Sniffing and snuffing, the pig found a favorable spot. He began plowing up the soil with his hook-like nose.

So intent upon his search for food was he that he failed to note the fatal rustle that drove the jaguar away. It came again, plainer, much more distinct, nearer; but the pig, true to his type, grubbed on.

From across a black, overhanging limb a massive head appeared. A stout body fol-

lowed—a long prodigious body. But no arms, no legs. A terrible thing to see in the dark.

The pig saw, but too late. With a swiftness startling in a creature so huge, the anaconda, a thirty foot snake, dipped down, seized the pig in his terrible jaws, then glided away.

The shrill scream of the pig was silenced. It had been like dropping a cat into a well.

But now there came a different sound, the sound of an approaching creature. It was not the soft pat-pat-pat of the jaguar, the scuffing scrape of the pig, nor the glide of a snake. It was the slow steady thud-thud-thud of human footsteps.

CHAPTER XXV

A HUMAN HOUND

It was on the afternoon of this day of Curlie's great despair that Dave and Clinton having spent three days in fruitless search for their lost comrade, with every balata gatherer on the trail, hit upon a novel method of search.

Wishing to trade a boat load of food for a machete, one of the dwarfs from upriver made them a visit.

"Taraque says these dwarfs are human bloodhounds," Dave exclaimed. "He says they trail game, wild pig, turkey and deer by the sense of smell. Why couldn't they trail a human being as well?"

"Worth trying," said Clinton. "Where's

the chief? Go tell him to sound the fellow out."

Dave was hopeful as the dwarf appeared. With extraordinarily long arms, short body and extended canine teeth, he looked the part he was to play.

"He says that he might do," said the chief, "but he must get the scent from something the boy has worn."

"Here are his slippers," said Dave.

Like a hunting dog, the dwarf distended his nostrils and snuffed loudly. Still like a hunter he circled the camp, until at last he shot away in a straight line.

"He's got the scent. Come on, let's follow him!" exclaimed Dave enthusiastically.

Greatly interested in this new type of human being, Clinton readily joined him. So too did a half dozen native hunters.

Like a tiger-hunting party, they went beating their way through the bush.

For a half hour the dwarf hunter went steadily forward. Then he appeared to be-

come perplexed. He went a short distance, paused, circled, returned to his starting place, back-tracked a short way, turned and circled again, then returned to his starting point once more.

"He's lost the scent," said Dave gloomily. "I guess it's no good."

Seeming to catch the meaning of his words, the dwarf shot a few rapid words at the chief.

"He says the scent is too old. He cannot follow. But if you wish a jaguar or a deer he will lead you to either."

"Good!" said Clinton. "We will try him on that."

Again the strange, dog-like brown man circled wide. Again he sniffed the air to go darting away. Imagine their astonishment when, a half hour later, pointing with his finger he showed them a jaguar flattened against a tree-trunk not twenty yards away.

Two shots from Dave's rifle secured this golden trophy.

"Marvelous!" said Clinton.

"But that doesn't find my pal," said Dave gloomily.

"No," said Clinton very soberly, "And I am afraid he will never be found. It is a serious business, this getting lost in an Amazon jungle—a very serious business."

Though they had not succeeded in finding Curlie, he had been found.

No scene from drama of stage or moving picture could have been more weird, more unusual than that enacted there on the lonely jungle trail.

A native, a boy of sixteen, moved with the steady even stride of an Indian down that trail on which Curlie slept. Where the moon broke through the all but perpetual canopy of trees it brought out his bare brown body like a moving statue of bronze.

Over one bare shoulder he carried a quiver of darts. The bottom of the quiver was strange, a trifle gruesome as seen there in the half light of the jungle. It was a small human skull.

In his right hand the boy carried a blowgun. So he advanced and as he glided along there was a sort of rhythm of motion that suggested a song, yet no sound escaped his lips.

Of a sudden he came to a dead halt. What had halted him? There had come no sound. He did not listen now. Like a setter scenting birds, he leaned far forward and breathed deeply through his nose. Throughout his lithe body there ran a shudder.

For a full moment he stood there motionless. Then, having selected a dart from among those in the skull, he slipped it into his blowgun.

After that, with cat-like glides, he crept forward until with a sudden intake of breath, he came up short. Before him in a patch of moonlight lay a silent form, the form of a white boy, Curlie.

Crouching low on his haunches, with blowgun in readiness, the native boy remained in

motionless repose for a full quarter of an hour.

Then, with blowgun close to his lips, he moved closer, a step at a time, the blowgun against his lips.

There came no move, no sound. Reassured, the native dropped on his knees to examine the form before him, his ear close to the sleeper's lips.

The white boy's arms and legs were red, lacerated and swollen from bites and scratches. The native boy saw the marks, and a change came over him.

Disappearing into the bush, he returned presently with leaves damp with dew. How much his people know that is hidden to the white brother! He applied the leaves to the sores. So light was his touch that the white boy did not stir.

Then, with the damp of night glittering on his shoulders, with long arms crossed over his feet, he sat and dozed with one eye open, watching the boy from the land beyond.

When Curlie awoke the light of day was breaking.

The native boy rose, and with a swinging arm motioned him down the trail. Shuddering at sight of the human skull which the native used for a quiver, but welcoming any chance of rescue, Curlie followed on.

The trail led up a narrow, rapid stream. As full daylight arrived, the native boy paused and, breaking some slender limbs of a certain bush, began stripping away its bark. Not knowing what it was all about, but glad for an opportunity to do something, the white boy followed his example.

When they had collected considerable bark, the native boy gathered it in his hands, then sprang down over the rocks to the edge of a deep, dark pool. Binding the strips of bark around a boulder, the boy threw the whole into the center of the pool.

"Now what sort of magic is that?" thought Curlie.

He was soon enough to see. Five minutes

had not passed when fishes began rising to the surface. Turning, flopping, darting this way and that, they behaved like drunken things.

Leaping into the pool, the native boy began throwing them out. Catching them, Curlie gathered them in a small hollow space among the ferns.

When there were more than a dozen the native boy left the pool to gather up the fish and carry them to a great flat rock.

"Fresh fish," thought the famished white boy. "How delicious!"

"But then," he became despondent. But suppose they were poisoned?"

He was to see.

The native had gathered a pile of dry moss and sticks and was quite evidently doing his best to make a fire.

Seeing this, Curlie took out his box of matches, scratched one, touched the moss, and a flame shot up.

For a moment the native stared at him in

amazement. Then he put out a hand for the box. Reluctantly, the white boy relinquished this treasure. He dared not refuse.

Drawing forth a match, the native boy struck it, then watched wide-eyed as it burned. Evidently he had never before seen a match. But to Curlie's dismay, he lighted another and yet another. As each threatened to burn his fingers, he dropped it, to look at the white boy and laugh.

The white boy did not laugh. Here was tragedy; yet he dared not interfere. So, with a scratch in the beginning, a laugh at the end, the native boy disposed of match after match until not one remained.

"Well," Curlie told himself, "that's over. What next?"

The next thing was a meal of fish broiled over hot coals. Curlie dared not touch them at first.

Seeing the Indian begin to eat, however, he threw aside discretion and joined in.

The fish were fine. No bad results came

of the feast, and, having broken bread together, the two were pals.

"Now where will he take me next?" Curlie asked himself. "Wonder if I am to become a nomadic savage?"

CHAPTER XXVI

PLANNING A SECRET MISSION

In the meantime, in the balata camp where the great heap of "white gold" grew larger and larger day by day, there was cause for great anxiety. Every hour that passed made Clinton and Dave more certain that their good friend and jolly pal Curlie would never return.

"And yet we must not leave this spot until the last spark of hope is gone," said Dave as the two sat beside a burned out campfire.

"No, we wouldn't wish to," said Clinton, "and yet we may be obliged to."

"Why?" asked Dave quickly.

"Have you not noticed the growing restlessness of our natives?"

"They have been acting strangely. Walking down to the river, launching canoes, paddling about, returning to shore. Don't seem much purpose to it all."

"Purpose enough. Their actions show plainer than words that they have been away from their wives, their hearth fires and their household gods as long as they care to be. In this they are akin to all primitive people, and some who are not so primitive. They cannot bear isolation.

"I hear them mumbling among themselves. They fear the water god. Curlie's disappearance has heightened their fear. The lurking evil of the forest has got him, they say, or perhaps the old Crocodile King's men are lurking about to pick us off one at a time. If only Curlie would return!"

"Yes," said Dave, "if he only would!"

"In case he does not return by to-morrow night, I think we must go up the river to the village of the dwarfs."

"At night?" Dave's tone registered surprise.

"It's the only way I can think of. There are certain packages in that dead white man's house which must be carried to the outposts of civilization. Much depends on it—the lives of many.

"I have no reason to suppose that those dwarf people will stand peaceably by and see these packages carried away. Their loyalty to the dead man—a misdirected loyalty, in this case—combined with their superstitious beliefs regarding his spirit, will cause them to fight for the least thing that was his.

"It would seem best to go in the night and carry it away. One does not care to impersonate a housebreaker, but there seems to be no other way."

"To-morrow night," said Dave.

"To-morrow night," Clinton repeated solemnly.

After that, for a long time they stared at the fire until the last spark, as if inspired by a

dying hope, leaped in air to vanish into the night.

"You spoke of their superstition regarding that white man's spirit," said Dave, huskily. "You remember the notes of a violin that came to us from that tree? You don't think ——"

"Of course not. Utterly absurd!" Clinton exploded.

"But who, then, could it have been?"

"Don't know. You may never know. Half the mysteries of the world are never solved. And yet these fellows that write books, and the ones that read them, too, think a good job has not been done until the last least mystery has been dragged from the shadows into the glaring light of day. Come on. Let's turn in."

Ten minutes later Dave crept into his hammock. He did not sleep at once. Too many problems were haunting his mind. He was greatly worried about Curlie. They had been friends for a long time. To lose him now—it wasn't thinkable! He refused to believe that

anything serious could have happened. And yet he was deeply disturbed.

"And now if our natives force us to go down river," he thought, "that will come near being a catastrophe."

He thought of the Crocodile King and his men. Where were those men now? Had they gone downstream, or were they lurking, brigand-like, in some dark eddy of the river to spring upon them and rob them of their white gold?

"They won't do that without a fight!" he told himself stoutly.

He thought of the strange music in the treetop, of their proposed mission upriver at night.

"What could warrant our taking so great a risk?" he asked himself. "'The lives of many are at stake,' Clinton said. What could he have meant? What was in that letter he took from the dead man's table?"

In the midst of all this wondering, he fell asleep.

Next morning Dave thought of something Curlie had brought in their kit but had never used, a small, powerful, portable radio receiving set.

"I'll get it going," he told himself. "Curlie is such an incurable radio bug that he should be able to set up a sending set at the heart of the jungle.

"A grape vine for an aerial, bubbling brook for batteries," he mused. Then he smiled.

He knew that his thoughts were absurd. "Yet you never can tell," he said to himself. "Somewhere in this wilderness there is a monkey, or a ghost, or some other creature who plays a violin in the treetops. Why might there not be a radio station hidden out here somewhere? If there were, Curlie'd find it. He—he'd smell it."

For some time after adjusting the radio and snapping the head set over his ears, he caught only indistinct sounds; vague whispers as from the dead came to him. Curious strains of music, haunting bits of song, suggestive

rumblings of deep bass voices, these all came to tell him of a world he had left far behind.

"An invisible wall. You will pass an invisible wall," he whispered to himself. Vague whispers on the radio seemed to suggest that he had already passed that wall and that never would he return to his beloved land of sunshine and song.

"An invisible wall," he thought again. "How could a wall be invisible? A wall of glass, perhaps. But those words were said to Curlie, not to me. Can it be that he alone is to pass that wall, has perhaps already passed it, that he alone will not return to Manaos?"

He received scant comfort from this possibility. How could one gain happiness from his own good fortune, if catastrophe were to overtake his pal?

"We must find him," he told himself stoutly. "We—"

His thoughts were broken off by a sudden burst of sound that struck his eardrums.

"This is the Government radio station at

Manaos," a voice said. "At the request of the British Government we are broadcasting a message concerning Colonel Wamsley and his daughter who some weeks ago went up the Rio Negra in a white power boat. They were to search for a brother of the Colonel, a recluse supposed to be living among savage tribes at the headwaters of the Amazon. The Colonel and his daughter are long overdue on their return trip. It is feared that disaster has befallen them. Should anyone receiving this message know anything regarding them, please get into communication with the British Embassy at Manaos at once."

"At once," said Dave. His face twisted into a strange smile. "We saw the Colonel and his daughter pass up the river some time ago; no doubt about it.

"So that person in the back of the white schooner was a girl," he mused. "How—how romantic!

"And the Colonel's brother! The dead man

up the river! The dead man whose house we are to visit to-night, I'll be bound!

"Perhaps," he told himself, "the white boat with the Colonel on board will be coming round the corner tomorrow, even to-day.

"Well, they better hurry. Our days in this camp are numbered."

Again he thought of coming events and of his long lost pal, and his face grew sober.

CHAPTER XXVII

FIVE DIAMOND GRATERS

When they had eaten their fill of fish, Curlie and his new-found friend, the young savage, took away up the trail.

As they traveled the white boy had opportunity to study this curious boy who had appeared from nowhere. He seemed rather small for his age. Possibly he belonged to a race of dwarfs. His hair was straight and black, his dark eyes expressive. His limbs were like things of steel. More than once, unable to keep the pace, Curlie was obliged to call out to him. He found himself in mortal terror lest this strange companion should desert him to the cruel loneliness and despair which the

silent jungle, pressing in upon him, inspired within him.

When at last they had traveled for a half day, he became convinced that the boy meant to stand by him. In this he found comfort. But the course they took was carrying them farther and farther from his friends. He was sure of this, for they were mounting higher and higher. The scenery became more rugged, and streams more wild and turbulent.

"Where has he been? Where is he taking me?"

At times he found himself regretting the loss of his matches. Without them he could make no fire. Without cooked food he could not live.

"But if I had refused him, what would have happened?" he asked himself. To this question he could find no answer. So they trudged on.

Noon found him upon the crest of a ridge looking down upon a gorgeous valley where palm crests and tops of hardwood trees vied

with one another in splendor, while far, far away filmy clouds shimmered against the azure sky.

He was recalled from this scene by the actions of his comrade. He was stalking something. In a moment he was out of sight, yet Curlie dared not follow.

"Frighten away the game," he told himself.

When at the end of ten minutes the boy did not return, he began to despair. Had he lost him, this last, least of human companions?

Five minutes of mental agony was followed by a shout of joy. The native boy returned. In his left hand he carried two plump young birds the size of partridges.

That there was little need of his matches the white boy soon learned. By a trick of his own, the Indian boy soon had a blazing fire.

Once more they ate. Then they again took to the trail.

"The trail grows broader, more beaten down. We are coming to a village," the white boy told himself. Suddenly, on parting the

fronds of a palm, he found himself looking upon a fairly broad river. And on the fern-grown banks of that stream, resting after a feast of manatee, were at least thirty little brown people.

At sight of him they sprang to their feet. A few words from the native boy served to quiet them. At once, like country children about a peddler's pack, they crowded around him.

One felt of his ragged garments. A man drew his knife from its holster and felt gingerly of its edge. A woman examined his bare white arm. Then spitting upon her finger, she scrubbed away at the white skin.

"Thinks I'm painted," he told himself, amused.

Their curiosity satisfied, they offered him food, half roasted manatee, little white bananas and a bright red fruit the size of walnuts that looked and tasted like tomatoes. The fruit he ate while his companion apparently explained that they had eaten meat only a short time before.

So the afternoon passed, and shadows began to fall. In the boy's mind were many questions. Who were these people? Was this a small hunting party, away for a time from a large village, or were they true nomads?

Here there were no shelters. A few rude cooking pots, hunting implements, blowguns and spears, some bamboo baskets filled with odds and ends of things—this was their kit. At this time of year when there was no rain there was little enough need for shelter.

That night, after a hearty meal, they all lay down to sleep. Welcoming their invitation, Curlie lay upon a mat of fresh palm leaves beside the boy who had found him. So like pals, the two of them, one brown the other white, slept the night through.

It was in the morning that Curlie made a surprising discovery. Chancing to glance at a farinha grater that an old woman was using, he sensed something familiar about it. He was not a moment discovering that this grater

was an exact counterpart of the diamond set grater in Clinton's possession.

"Diamonds and all!" he told himself, excitedly.

Nor was that all. Every grater in the camp, and there were five, was exactly of that type.

"I have found the tribe that sets its graters with diamonds," he told himself. "Who would dare say that I will not now discover the mine?"

Then he laughed a low laugh. What use could diamonds be to one who, to all appearances, was destined to a life of wandering with a primitive tribe, or to slow and painful death in the jungle?

"For all that," he assured himself, "I will see what I can find out. When one has many interests he cannot well despair."

CHAPTER XXVIII

A DEAD MAN'S HOUSE AT MIDNIGHT

On the night that Curlie found himself sleeping on palm leaves beneath the stars, Clinton and Dave made their way silently up the dark, shadowy aisles of the river. Having confided the secret of their mission to the chief, they had secured his consent and ready cooperation.

"Those are simple people up yonder," he had said. "Truly they will not understand. It is better to do as you say. Four men will go with you to paddle your canoe."

So now they glided swiftly, silently upstream. For a long time, save for the all but inaudible dip-dip of paddles, there came no sound. Then, as if unable to bear the silence

longer, Clinton began speaking in a shrill whisper.

"Suppose you've wondered about the dead white man up yonder?"

"Yes."

"They buried him, the dwarfs did, just as he asked them to do before he died."

Again for a time there was silence. From somewhere off in the jungle there came the long-drawn single note of a night bird. Something moved in the water. Then all was still, the intense stillness of a jungle river at night.

"It's strange," said Clinton, exactly as if he had been talking all the time. "That man came from a fine old English family. Seems to have been a graduate physician and a scientist of considerable ability."

"He was?"

"Name was Wamsley. Buried himself here for twenty years."

"Wamsley!" Dave thought of the mysterious white motor boat that had gone up-

stream, and the radio message he had listened in on that very day. "Then it's true," he told himself. "No doubt about it. He's that girl's uncle."

"It's strange," Clinton continued. "In that letter I found on the table he does not tell why he came. He only tells what he has done. It's marvelous."

Again for a time there was silence.

"I've always felt that there were many valuable secrets hid away in these jungles," he went on at last. "This Englishman stayed here to search out those secrets. He found them, too. You saw those packages?"

"Yes."

"They are filled with leaves and bark of vines and trees. Some have great healing power. One, so his letter says, is a positive cure for infection. I believe it. What a boon to humanity! Thousands die of infection every year.

"There are other cures. In a bulky manuscript I found on a shelf are instructions for

using the remedies; also an account of his life here among these wild people. The manuscript is priceless; so, too, are the remedies. So you see what a burden of responsibility rests upon our shoulders?" The scientist's voice grew suddenly tense. "Your white gold, my meager observations, what are they compared to this man's twenty years of collecting and calm observing? Nothing. Nothing at all."

Again the river swept past them in silence, and as it swept on a fresh burden seemed to drop upon the boy's shoulders.

"We must succeed in to-night's mission," he told himself. "Then we must get back to Manoas. Soon. Soon!"

Then he thought of his lost pal, and his heart failed him. It was indeed a strange and puzzling world; so many hopes, so many fears, so many burdens and responsibilities, so many problems to solve and so little time for the solving.

So they glided steadily up the river until a break in the shore line of trees told them they had arrived.

Just as they stepped from the canoe to shore, Clinton looked at his watch. The hands were together at twelve.

"Midnight," Dave thought to himself, "and we are about to enter a dead man's house unbidden."

For a moment his knees threatened to give way beneath him. In the end, gathering courage from their high purpose, he took up the two cloth bags coated with native rubber, which were to contain the strange treasure, then in absolute silence followed the scientist up the narrow hard beaten trail.

His courage had returned. Questions as to the outcome of this adventure darted through his mind for all that. What if they were discovered? Cold perspiration started out upon his forehead as he thought of the silent poison darts. What if the boatmen left at the river's

brink should become panic stricken and desert them? What then?

He received c o m f o r t from one thing. Through the influence of the dead white man these dwarfs had become half civilized. "But what of that?" he thought. "It's little more than a veneer. Besides, they would fight all the fiercer for the things he prized. Seems there should have been another way."

They were nearing the cabin door, when something moved in the shadows.

The boy started back. What was this? A dog? Would he bark, arouse the village? He had seen no dog. Did a native guard sleep in the path before the cabin? Had he gone to raise an outcry?

"Only a big lizard," whispered Clinton. "Come on. Bring the bags." His hand was on the wooden latch.

Without a sound he lifted the latch and pushed the door back.

With trembling limbs the boy followed him in.

"A dead man's house," he thought. The shadow of a palm moving over a square of moonlight executed a ghost-like movement. He shrank back. Then, gaining courage, he advanced.

"Here," he thought as he held a bag for Clinton to fill, "a white man lived. Twenty years of sunrises greeted him. Twenty years of sunsets bade him goodnight. And here at last he wrapped his mantle about him to lie down to a last pleasant dream. What must those dreams have been?"

"Here! The other bag," Clinton whispered.

The second bag was filled. Then, without a sound, they shouldered their burdens. Only for a moment did the boy hesitate. In that moment he crossed the room to tuck the ancient violin under his arm.

"Now," he said to himself, "there will be no more violin music from the tops of trees."

Through the darkness and in absolute silence they made their way to the boat. As

Dave prepared to step into the waiting canoe, there came a piercing scream from shore.

Startled, unnerved, he made a false step, and but for Clinton who seized him by the arm, would have plunged, burden and all, into the black water.

"Only a parrot caught by some wild thing," hissed Clinton, "Get a grip on yourself."

The next moment they were gliding noiselessly downstream.

They were back at camp before dawn. That their troubles were not over they were soon enough to know. In an hour's time every native of their crew knew of the night's adventure. This knowledge made them more restless than before.

"What if the dwarfs discover that things have been taken from the cabin? What if they come downstream painted black with war paint, waving spears and blowguns? Can the white man quiet them? He cannot. We must go down river at once."

So they argued, and since they were of

the greater number and greater power, their counsel needs must prevail.

That evening, just before sunset, the *Red Rover,* her deck piled high with white gold, glided from the bank to midstream, then shot downward. She was followed by the native crews. Balata gathering was at an end. Henceforth there lay before the white man and his boy companion the task of running past all dangers, the Crocodile King's men, the Crocodile King himself, the whirlpool below, and of bringing their priceless cargo to the outposts of civilization.

To an adventure-loving boy like Dave, this should have brought a thrill of anticipation. Not Dave. He was thinking of his pal. They were leaving him behind. Every mile they covered seemed to lessen his chance of ever seeing him again.

"And beside this," he thought bitterly, "what can matter?"

Their treasure of white gold had become ashes at his feet. For the moment, even the

hope of bringing the dead Englishman's great medical secrets to the waiting world did not inspire him.

"Curlie! Oh, my good pal Curlie!" he half sobbed. And so, overcome by fatigue and excessive emotion, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TERRIBLE NECKLACE

Curlie was far from being dead. Indeed he was very much alive. At the time when Dave was worrying most about him, he was living as in a dream. He was finding diamonds. Not such a great number had come to his hand as yet, but there must be many more.

"Looks too," he reflected grimly, "as if I would have time enough for gathering them."

It had happened in this way. Having noticed the diamond set farinha graters and revealed his interest in the stones by examining them closely, he was presented with a loose stone by a little dried up old woman.

At once he began crawling about on the ground as if searching for others. At first his actions merely amused the natives. But in time they came to realize his meaning. He wished to know the origin of these stones.

Then heads were put together. An animated discussion followed. As a result, the woman who had given him the first diamond beckoned him to follow her.

Leading along down a steep path that followed a tumultuous stream, she at last turned sharply to the right and began to climb. Agile as a mountain lion, sure footed as a goat, she was often obliged to give him a hand across a narrow chasm or up a narrow trail when a single misstep meant death.

As they advanced the boy began hearing something. Now he thought it the song of a thousand little birds, and now it came to him as the rush of many waters.

Water was right. Suddenly, as they rounded a jagged point of rock they came within sight of one of the most beautiful waterfalls

that any man has ever been privileged to look upon.

Backed by the dark green of palms, mingling in its sprays the green of tropical life with the golden glow of the sun, it painted a picture there that Curlie will not forget.

The picture was lost to the old woman. Intent on her mission, she pushed on until with a lithe spring she disappeared into the dense spray that enveloped the base of the falls.

"She's gone," the boy told himself.

But no. A moment later a knotty hand came up through the spray. In the hand were two small stones.

"Diamonds! From such a place!" Curlie thought as he took them from the hand.

At intervals during a full half hour the hand went up. Each time it clasped diamonds, two, three, five, seven; some small, none exceedingly large, but all diamonds.

"Diamonds f r o m t h e f o a m," the boy

thought. "It is as if the terrific pounding of water forged them there."

At last, water soaked and shivering with cold, the old woman rose like a spirit from the spray to lie prone upon a flat rock and bask in the sunlight.

It was at this time that Curlie discovered that which made his blood run cold. Having caught a gleam from the woman's neck, he examined a necklace she wore. Often he had seen native necklaces made of jaguar or crocodile teeth.

"But why the gleam?" he asked himself.

He was not long in discovering that the teeth had never belonged to a crocodile. To his horror he saw that the necklace was composed entirely of human teeth, and that one of the teeth, the one that cast back the gleam of the sun, had at one time or another been filled by a dentist with gold.

Of a sudden, despite the tropical sun that beat down upon him, the boy went deathly cold. "Head hunters," he thought. "These

people are head hunters. And that is a white man's tooth."

No discovery could have startled him more. It was as if he were the hero of a fairy story and he had suddenly discovered himself to be in the house of a man-eating giant.

Time brought to his reeling senses a steady calm. He was perhaps in no immediate danger. Even the head hunters kill only their enemies. He was trying to prove himself a friend.

As the night shadows fell, at the old woman's invitation he bound the handful of valuable stones she had taken from beneath the spray in a piece of stout soft leather and, tying this to his belt, followed her lead back to camp and to a much relished meal of farinha bread baked on the coals, and roast wild turkey.

"Ought to feel reasonably happy," he told himself as he lay down to sleep beside his bed fellow of the night before. "At least I am alive, and do not lack for food. But—"

Again he shuddered as in his imagination he again caught the gleam of that gold-filled tooth.

"Of course," he told himself, "she may have got it from a dentist who pulled it. But that doesn't seem reasonable up here."

CHAPTER XXX

BLACK WAR PAINT

Morning found the *Red Rover* still gliding downstream. Her progress ceased at sunrise. The reason was a peculiar one, and was entirely Dave's fault.

Having noticed bits of grass rising from the dark depths of the river bottom, he called a warrior's attention to this curious phenomenon.

"Do fish eat grass?" he asked.

"No," exclaimed the warrior, "but manatee do. Manatee are very large and good to eat. We are short of food. Stop the boat and we will harpoon them."

At once there was commotion on board. Nothing could persuade the natives to go on.

A manatee hunt, the most exciting of all jungle sports, was before them. They were a long way from the village of dwarfs. The dwarfs would not come this far. They had traveled all night, had they not? Then were they not entitled to a rest? They would use the rest period for hunting.

The *Red Rover* nosed her way up a small stream for a distance of a hundred yards. There she was moored to an overhanging Santa Maria tree.

At once the natives began rigging out harpoons with shafts of wood, bits of steel and long coils of rawhide rope.

"They will be two hours in getting ready," Clinton said, a little wearily. "Who can say how many hours it will be before they return from the hunt? Manatee spells madness to these natives.

"The chief tells me," he went on, "that there is a small abandoned settlement a mile or two up this creek. There appears to be enough of a trail to take us there. I pro-

pose that we go there in search of ancient ornaments, crockery and the like."

Dave found this suggestion disappointing. He had hoped to go with the hunters. He had heard much of the excitement that came with the hunting of these monsters whose weight at times came near to half a ton; how they stayed at the bottom of the river; how when harpooned they set the canoe tearing over the surface of the river, and how at last the boat is overturned, the manatee lost, or the beast worn out by the struggle, comes to the top and is killed. But Clinton's wishes were always his own.

"The natives will set a watch over our boat," said Clinton. "But for that matter there is little need. Who will be passing?"

"No one."

"And if someone should pass, why should he venture up this creek?"

"He wouldn't."

"Safe as your home back there in Illinois."

* * *

That day for Curlie, there in the far away camp of the unknown people who had found him and saved him from the terrors of the jungle, was one of mingled curiosity and dread.

"Head hunters!" he whispered as, very early in the morning, he recalled the gold-filled tooth. He thought of his own very useful and desirable teeth. He shuddered afresh as he wondered how soon those would be gracing the neck of some dusky maiden.

From early morning it became evident that something of importance was on foot. Every native seemed nervous and excited. The women worked feverishly at scraping roots, squeezing out the poison, drying and baking farinha. The men were quite as busy shaping spear handles, fitting points to them, and testing blowguns.

"Is it to be a hunt or a raid on an enemy's camp?" he asked himself.

Apparently no one paid the least attention to his movements; yet twice when he strolled

rather far from camp he caught dark eyes regarding him narrowly.

"Don't know what is to happen," he told himself at last. "One thing's sure, though; whatever it is, I'm in on it."

Along toward evening an old woman, she of the gold-set necklace, disappeared into the bush. She returned presently heavily laden with huge green nuts.

Having cut the bark from these nuts, she began beating this bark into a pulp. At last she placed this pulp into a farinha press and applied the pressure. A liquid black as night came dripping and pouring out.

"Poison," was the boy's thought.

But when a considerable quantity of the black juice had been extracted, women seized brushes made of palm fibre and began to paint their naked men black.

Fearful and wonderful was the transformation as the men, black as night, began to leap about in frenzied dance.

"War!" he thought as he went cold all

over. "There is to be an attack. How can I escape from the horror of it all?"

But worse was to come. Scarcely had the warriors been painted than he was stripped of his few ragged clothes and painted black as they.

At first thrown into wild consternation, he thought of resisting. In the end he got a real laugh out of it as he gazed at his image in a still pool.

"Minstrel show," he thought, and laughed again. The laugh did him good. Unfortunately it was short lived, for serious business was at hand. Strange and terrible things were to happen ere the coming night was done.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RED ROVER VANISHES

The deserted village which Clinton and Dave found not two miles up from the mouth of the creek was a find indeed.

True, here were only crumbling piles of decaying poles and palm fibre, but farther back from the bank of the stream were mounds grown green with ferns. These mounds were the true treasure houses. By digging into these with a sharp flat stick they were able to unearth articles of ancient design. Two small gods of bronze, an elaborately decorated bowl, a number of copper spear points carved with crude images of women, children, wild beasts and fighting men, were unearthed.

To their surprise they at last uncovered two articles which could have reached the silent fastnesses of the jungle only through the hands of the white man—a kettle of black tin and the bronze top of an ancient sun dial.

"What sort of a place do you think this might have been?" Dave asked in surprise.

"May have been a mission. The early missionaries of this land were fearless and brave. They may have established a post here and taught the Indians something of agriculture and horticulture.

"This," said Clinton, placing his hand on the broad trunk of an ancient palm, "would seem to bear that theory out."

"A coconut palm," said Dave in surprise after one glance upward, "and ripe with coconuts, a half dozen of them. We must have them."

"Very well, up you go!" Clinton gave him a lift and soon he was sending the dry coconuts rattling down.

Having cut away the outer shell, he stowed this find in his sack.

"We must go back," said Clinton, looking in surprise at his watch. "We've been up here four hours. Who could have believed it?"

An hour had not passed when they put aside the last screen of foliage that hid them from the stretch of dark water where the *Red Rover* with her valuable cargo had been tied.

"What's this?" Clinton's voice rang out with surprise.

"Gone!" said Dave, suddenly sitting down. "What—"

"They must have come back with their catch and have taken the boat back to the river," said Clinton, unable to believe that they were alone and powerless in a vast wilderness.

"But why?"

"Better place to roast their fresh meat,

perhaps. Let's go." Once more they were on the march.

They were not long in reaching the river. There Dave climbed to a precarious perch on a dead tree that lay half in the water and looked both up and downstream. No *Red Rover,* no boat of any kind met his gaze.

Slowly, silently he climbed back to land and sat down upon a rotting log. There was no need to tell what he had or had not seen. Clinton knew. In the mind of each the realization that they were alone without a boat some eighteen hundred miles up the Amazon, that unless the tide of fortune turned they had lost not alone the treasures they had wrung from the hand of a hostile land, but death itself pressed in upon them as a dark shroud. With the rainy season all but upon them, they could not by any stretch of imagination picture themselves making their way over those hundreds of miles of river, living off the land, empty handed, battling wild creatures and perhaps wild men as well,

and coming at last safe, sound and triumphant at the end of their goal.

Yet life is good and youth is hopeful. They did not entirely despair.

"What do you say we eat!" exclaimed Clinton suddenly.

"Not so bad. But what?"

"When we left the boat I brought along a little farinha bread and the milk from your coconuts should be delicious. Shouldn't advise eating much of the coconut meat. It's rather indigestible."

Five minutes later Dave was partaking of a meal which might be his last. He enjoyed it none the less.

CHAPTER XXXII

BLOOD RED BATTLE

It was night. The river with the endless canopy of trees above it was like a railway tunnel for blackness. Down this tunnel, in four war canoes floated the roving band of wild men. In the last canoe, crumpled up at the stern with a naked native crowded in beside him, was Curlie.

At dusk the whole camp had been stripped and packed. They were now off on some terrible mission. There were spears and blowguns on every hand. The boy found himself growing cold with suspense. Would they make him fight? Could they? They could not, unless they were themselves attacked. If this were to be a raid on some sleeping village he

must somehow escape. The wilderness was cruel. This that lay before him was more cruel still.

For three hours he was held in suspense. All this time they drifted down that black tunnel of night.

Then, as a torch in the foremost canoe flared up and blinked out, the line swerved, to come at last to shore at the entrance of a small stream.

Here, without a word, the warriors disembarked. There came the sound of someone gliding away over a trail. Then all was silence. There followed a half hour when expectation, tense and terrifying, hung over all.

Again the sound of soft footsteps. The messenger returned. Soft whispers. These grew louder, more excited. A torch was lighted—another and yet another. About the torches a dance begun. The figures of warriors, black and terrible, leaped and gestured and leaped again.

"There is to be an attack," the boy told himself. "I will not go with them."

Strange as it may seem, he was not asked. A large spear was set up beside him. He was left to make his own choice. Perhaps they were glad to leave him to defend the women and children. This, he told himself, he would do to the last drop of his blood.

But this other was terrible to contemplate. In the end he found his overwrought nerves growing numb. It was the end, this affair. He had dared hope that in time these strange people might bring him to the abode of some white man. But now—

Even as he thought this a horrible scream rent the air. This was followed by another and yet another. The night grew hideous with noises.

"I will escape into the jungle," he told himself. "Beside this the jungle is kind."

His hand chancing to touch his belt came into contact with a small bag that hung there.

"Diamonds," he thought. "I have diamonds

and all too soon perhaps I will be perishing with hunger."

Stopping his ears to shut out the horror of sounds, he waited for the end.

"The end," he thought. "What will it be? If these attackers are defeated I may yet find myself fighting for my life and for the life of the defenseless ones about me."

The attackers did not lose. In the end, laden with trophies so terrible that the boy could not so much as take one look at them, the warriors came skulking back. One was missing; one, carried by his companions, had been severely wounded. In the end, the boats laden with booty glided out of the little stream and again drifted steadily downward in the tunnel of darkness.

"We are not to return to the place from which we came," the boy told himself. "They will land and make camp soon. They will lie down for a brief sleep, then I will sneak away in the dark. The jaguar, the great boa con-

strictor and the crocodile are happy companions beside these."

He set to wondering why they had spared his life. Some strange break of fancy, he supposed. How long was that fancy to last? A few hours at least, he hoped. Yet with their wild blood boiling in the heat of battle and conquest, who could tell?

He lay down, as before, beside his young companion on a bed of palm leaves, but he did not sleep. Life at this moment seemed too terrible for sleep. In the darkness of that night men, and perhaps women, had been killed.

"This," he told himself, "is the terrible slums of a jungle. Here primitive man who has never come in contact with the better ways and gentler teachings of those who have come to know the great Spirit are like beasts that prey upon one another.

"Yes," he told himself, "as soon as they are all sound asleep I will creep away into the jungle."

But, weary from long hours of unrest, worn down by excessive excitement, while he waited he too fell away into fitful slumber.

* * * * * *

When Dave and Clinton had become fully convinced that their boat, their crew, their treasure of white gold and the priceless trophies from the dead white man's cabin were gone, they began casting about them for some means of escape from their plight.

"There's a type of palm," said Clinton; "I have seen them in this jungle. These natives make its trunk into a sort of rude boat. There is a great swelling well up on the trunk. By cutting the tree down and hollowing out this swollen part, then stopping the ends with mud, one has a boat of a sort. Of course it is a clumsy affair, quite unmanageable and unsafe in swift water, but if we could discover a tree of that sort we might at least eventually find ourselves on the move."

"Quite a job with a single machete," said Dave, glancing down at the big knife that

hung from his belt. "Anything is better than not trying at all. Let's have a look."

"It will be better for one of us to remain on watch here," said Clinton. "The evidence is rather strong that Taraque has tricked us and has gone downstream with all we possessed. But somehow I have come to think of him as a trustworthy person. They may have gone hunting manatee as they told us they were planning to do. While they were gone some wild native tribe may have happened along. In which case, of course, they overpowered the guard and made away with the boat. You stay here. I will have a look a little way into the jungle."

Who can measure the thoughts of the boy as he sat there staring down at the sweeping black waters of the river? Now he thought of his good pal Curlie, and was sad. It is hard to part with a boon companion in such a land.

But now he had a fairer dream. He saw Curlie at the head of some wild tribe, come floating down the river to rescue them. How

like the truth was his dream, yet how unlike.

And now, as the waters of the river appeared to grow blacker than before, he saw Clinton, his face emaciated by famine and fever, battling to save their lives in the terrible jungle that had trapped them.

It was in this last dreary dream that he suddenly leaped to his feet and began shouting like a wild man.

What had happened? The prow of a war canoe had come gliding round a turn in the river. In it, standing proudly erect and directing the course of his small fleet, stood the dauntless chief, Taraque.

"Saved!" he shouted. "Saved!"

But at once his heart failed him. Where was the *Red Rover* and her rich cargo? Gone! Stolen! She might never be seen again, could never be retaken without a fight.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A FACE IN THE NIGHT

Curlie was awakened from his fitful slumber there in the camp of the head hunters by some movement close beside him. When one's life hangs upon a thread, he does not act suddenly, not even when he has been wakened from his sleep. Opening his eyes wide, he lay perfectly still.

From the right he caught the regular breathing of his bed mate. From the left there came a movement of air, like the faint breath of a breeze. But there was no breeze. The night was dead calm.

Seconds passed. His heart was pounding furiously.

"He'll hear it," he told himself.

Then of a sudden, the moon coming out from behind a cloud, revealed a face. Not twenty inches from him this face at once seemed vaguely familiar.

Before the face was a hand. The hand was beckoning. Without a sound the lips moved. Alternately gazing at him, then looking away, the dark eyes appeared also to beckon him away.

Then like a flash the thing came to him. He had seen that face twice, three times, a hundred, perhaps two hundred miles away. Mental pictures passed before his eyes, a naked brown boy, a blowgun, a swimming manatee, a puff of air, a dead manatee. The scene changed and he beheld that same boy fighting for his life against an angry band of little wild pigs.

"That boy," he thought. "He is the boy I saved from the band of wild pigs far down the river. Who can he be? How did he come here?"

Still the hand, the eyes, the whole figure beckoned him away. One thought, and the die was cast. He had once saved this boy's life. In the darkest savage's breast must lurk some sense of gratitude.

Rolling over twice, he sprang to his feet, then went gliding away down the trail, following his phantom-like guide.

All that night they traveled. It was strange, haunting. The native's sense of direction, his powers of selecting the best trail, were uncanny. Not a word was said. Now they crossed a rocky ridge, now plunged into a canopied forest, dark as night, and now skirted a river, but always silent, sure-footed, unerring, they traveled on.

As dawn began to break the native gathered an armful of great yellow melons that grow there on trees. These he offered for food. Curlie found them delicious.

After that, having selected a spot deep in the forest where low, broad-leafed palms grew, the native boy built a place of conceal-

ment by setting up palm leaves in a circle. At the center of this circle he made a deep bed of leaves. Then, without a word or sign, having placed his blowgun and quiver of darts close beside him, he fell fast asleep.

To the white boy that day was a long one. Now sitting tailor-fashion on a mat of green palm leaves, now rising to pace restlessly back and forth in the narrow enclosure, at last to lie down and sleep ten winks, sleeping or awake he found his mind busied with many problems. Had they escaped the head hunters? It seemed so, yet who could know? Trails are strange. In their boats they might have glided downstream until they were only a stone's throw away.

Who was his strange companion who slept so peacefully? Was he a wandering member of the head hunters, a member of the band that had been raided, or some entirely different tribe? Whither were they bound? Had he been rescued from one terrible company of head hunters only to be led to another?

He turned his thoughts to other scenes, to Clinton and Dave, to the old Crocodile King and his men, to the singing monkey, the mysterious white man whose ghost was said to haunt the jungle, and to the white boat which had passed so silently and mysteriously up the river. Would he see any of these again? Would he ever hear again the joyous shouts of Taraque and his men or the haunting notes of a violin in the treetops?

So, with many thoughts, the day wore away. With the first dark shadows the native boy awoke. Leaving his companion, he went with his blowgun into the jungle. In a surprisingly short time he returned with a large brown bird much like a turkey.

Soon the flesh from this bird's breast, cut in thin strips, was roasting over a fire.

An hour later, well fed and feeling quite fit, Curlie followed his strange guide back to the trail.

"Another night of tramping," he thought.

In this he was wrong. They had not been

on the trail two hours when Curlie began hearing vaguely familiar sounds. Faint and from far away, they seemed drifting notes of some night bird's song.

As on more than one other occasion, when they came nearer, the sounds were definite, distinct, recognizable.

"The violin," he said out loud, halting in the trail. "The phantom violin!"

But the Indian boy had not halted. With the sounds growing louder, ever louder, he had marched straight on. Curlie could but follow.

Then, as they neared a great spreading tree that towered over the trail, the Indian boy stopped and began pointing with his finger at the tree.

"So that's where he is," said Curlie.

The Indian boy said nothing.

Up to this time the phantom violin had played only broken snatches of such music as one may hear as he travels the world over. But now, as if conscious of his audience, he

launched forth into that strangely haunting melody, "Song of India."

At once the white boy stood entranced, for whoever the musician might be, he was an artist and his violin was worthy of his art.

As the last, low notes died away, Curlie heaved a deep sigh, then glanced about him.

It was then that he received a shock. *The Indian boy had gone!*

"So this is what he led me to!" he said to himself. "Well, my friend of the phantom violin, be you monkey, man or ghost, I shall stay until the concert is over. Then I will see what comes down from the tree."

Having said this, he seated himself comfortably upon a bed of moss to await further development.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SWIFT JUSTICE IN NO MAN'S LAND

Taraque's story was soon told. Eager for manatee, he had hurried away in the first canoe. Two warriors had been told off to remain behind as guards of the *Red Rover*. In their zeal for hunting these men had disobeyed orders and had joined the last canoe. This had left the *Red Rover* unguarded. They had taken six fine manatees.

"But where is the *Red Rover?*" Clinton demanded.

"That old rascal, the Crocodile King, his men have got it," said the chief, showing all his white teeth in a grin. "I have seen the mark of their last camp upriver. Yes, indeed. But we shall punish them. Never fear. Only

let the white men get into our canoes; we will show how a thief is rewarded."

There could be no doubting the chief's sincerity, nor the truth of what he had told. Only one thing remained, to follow his suggestion and get aboard.

By great good fortune Clinton had loaned Taraque his finest rifle for the manatee hunt. The chief, preferring the silent blowgun, had not used it. It lay there now in the bottom of the canoe and a quantity of ammunition beside it.

It was with a sigh of satisfaction that Dave saw Clinton's hands grip that rifle. There was a suggestion of power in it.

That night will remain in Dave's mind as a drifting dream. All night long he sat in the stern of a canoe while they appeared to float through a blue-black sky where a million stars twinkled and danced. The sky was so blue and so starlit, the river so calm and black that the reflection of sky on water seemed the very sky itself.

So they drifted on. Paddles, moving with the regularity of machine driven things, aided the current in their downward progress. Now hazy questions drifted through his drowsy mind. Would they catch up with the thieves? Would there be a battle? Would they win? Would the *Red Rover* and all the treasure once more be theirs? At times he slept to dream of rifle shots and fierce fighting. Then again he could not sleep.

Morning dawned at last. As the sudden sunrise lighted the river, they found themselves in the midst of a broad stream.

Far away, on the horizon—the river was straight here—were some dark spots. One larger than the others seemed to catch the sunlight and cast it back.

"The *Red Rover*," Dave exclaimed.

"We're catching them," said Clinton. "The chief tells me there are two sharp turns next, then another broad stretch of still water. We'll go into action there." He sent a clip of

cartridges into the magazine of his rifle, then placed three other clips close at hand.

"I don't like trouble and bloodshed," he said, thoughtfully, "but if all the thieves had their way it would be a sorry world."

After that, the canoes glided along in silence. Dave was wondering what chance they had if the affair came to an open fight. Clinton had his rifle. The chief's natives had two very poor rifles and a number of blow-guns. It was probable that the Crocodile's crew had many guns. Did they have ammunition? That was the question. He thought with a groan of his own rifle and its supply of ammunition left in the *Red Rover.*

They passed one bend of the river. His mind was working overtime now. What if they had been seen? What if the robbers hid behind the next turn to ambush them? The next fifteen minutes were tense ones. Every nerve on the stretch, he waited. With wildly beating heart he saw their canoe round that point. But no—no ambush yet.

To his great joy he saw that they were gaining. Not a half mile ahead of them the *Red Rover* loomed out of the water. He could even distinguish figures leaning against the canopy on the after deck, and catch the gleam of paddles that drove her forward.

Back of her were two large war canoes well manned by the Crocodile's men.

"This rifle," said Clinton, standing up in the canoe, "is guaranteed to be effective at a mile." He adjusted his back sight. "This sight is telescopic. I can see them plainly enough."

"Those men," he went on steadily, "do not deserve to live. They are robbers. Much worse than robbers! In a land where a man's boat stands between him and almost certain death, they have stolen our boat. But more is at stake than their lives and ours. On board that stolen boat are reports of medical discoveries with which skilled physicians may save thousands of lives. These savages would but pitch them into the river. On us Providence

has laid the trust of delivering those secrets to the waiting world.

"The land we are now in is No Man's Land. Brazil claims it, Venezuela claims it. Neither governs it. In a land where there is no government every man is a law unto himself. The strongest man rules. May justice be done here!

"Now, Chief, just ask your men to cease paddling for a moment. Tell them to watch the last man in the first canoe."

Throwing his rifle to his shoulder, he took quick aim and fired. A second later, as if stung by a scorpion, the last man in the first canoe threw up his hands and leaped into the water.

"I don't like this. I hate bloodshed. But in this land a thief— Watch the *Red Rover!*" Clinton's words were short and sharp.

Another shot, a tense second, and a man on the *Red Rover* took to the water.

Once more Clinton lifted his rifle. But he did not fire. Things were happening up there

on the river. Shouts and cries rang out. Men leaped from their places in the canoe. They sprang into the water and were seen only as bobbing specks moving toward shore. Only one man remained in the *Red Rover.* He was waving his arms and shouting wildly.

"The Crocodile's big boss," said Clinton. He sent a bullet singing round this man's ears. Then he, too, was gone.

A half hour later the little party found themselves once more in possession of the *Red Rover.* Two war canoes half loaded with balata and hunting gear also were in tow.

"We'll put their balata on board the *Red Rover,*" said Clinton. "They stole it; never gathered it, those boys. But we'll give it to the Crocodile in return for a safe passage by the whirlpool." He grinned gleefully.

"We'll tow the canoes downstream three or four miles, then tie them up. We'll leave them all their gears but the rifles. Have to make sure they don't get back to the Crocodile King before we leave his territory."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE PHANTOM VIOLIN

Some ten minutes after Curlie sat down to wait for the end of the treetop recital, the notes of the phantom violin trailed faintly away into nothingness; and silence, deep, hushed, expectant, hung over the jungle.

Scarcely a moment had elapsed when the boy began hearing other sounds. Some creature, a monkey or a man perhaps, but certainly not a ghost, was descending from the treetop.

"A man," the boy thought.

Strangely enough, the person approached with the cautious movements of one who endeavors to catch a butterfly in his hat. He

appeared to expect the boy to take sudden flight.

"Queer," thought Curlie. "Perhaps he is a madman." The thought gave him a chill.

Then a light blinded him, a second only, and it was gone.

"So!" said a voice. The man was speaking. "So you are white! How strange. I had hoped you were an Indian. But there were two of you. Where is the other?"

"Gone," said Curlie. "He was an Indian." All the time his thoughts were racing. Who was this man? Why did he play a violin in the treetops at night? Why had he hoped to find an Indian?

"You were with the white man with a boat?" The stranger spoke in Spanish, but Curlie understood.

"Yes," Curlie replied eagerly. "I have been lost from them for days. Tell me. Do you know where they are?"

"I saw them but yesterday," the other re-

plied. "They can't have been five miles from here. They are still there, I am sure."

"Oh thanks—thank God!" the boy said fervently. "You will take me to them?"

"Presently. First I must eat a bit and rest my cramped limbs. A tree is no comfortable roosting place for a man. Trees are for monkeys. But then, there you are, Senor. It is all in the day's work."

"What work, and why do you play the violin in trees?" the boy wished to ask, but did not.

It was more than an hour later over a steaming cup of coffee with real bread and butter and sweet cakes, that Curlie learned the secret of the Phantom Violin.

"You played your violin far down the river, a hundred miles or more, did you not?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Senor." The answer was prompt and frank.

"But I heard you."

"No, Senor. Quite impossible. I have not played there."

"Then," Curlie smiled, "you have a double."

"Many doubles, if you choose to put it that way." It was the stranger's turn to smile.

"You, my friend," he began, sipping his coffee thoughtfully, "perhaps do not understand. I am of the Brazilian Indian Service. It is a great organization and does much good.

"You of the United States do not understand us very well. You cannot know how sad has been the story of the Indians of Brazil, how they have been robbed and enslaved, embittered by avaricious and heartless rubber hunters, gold prospectors, fortune hunters from every land. Nevertheless it has been done.

"Now our government is doing its best to make friends with these Indians, to help them and to make all the land safe for anyone who may wish to come and go."

"But why—"

"Why the violin?"—the Brazilian held up

his hand for silence. "It is our most splendid ally. Where is the savage whose breast cannot be soothed and softened by music?

"Our plan is this. We cannot hope to march right up to a savage tribe. They would kill us. We make camp in their territory, then we plant some presents in plain sight on a trail. After that, we climb a tree at night. We play the violin. They are attracted by the sound. If they come near, we talk to them in their own language, tell them of the presents we have left in the trail, assure them that we are their friends and invite them to our camp in the jungle.

"After a long, long time they come to trust us and our beloved Brazil has one more loyal tribe in the heart of her vast wilderness.

"But now," he exclaimed, springing to his feet, "we have eaten. I am rested. We will go at once to your camp. It can't be five miles away. We will be there at once."

At that same moment, something like a hundred miles away, the *Red Rover* might

have been seen gliding swiftly downstream. She had reached the border of the Crocodile's kingdom. By morning she would run her prow into the mud bank before the Crocodile King's palace, and that old rascal would roll from his hammock to devour with greedy eyes the great load of white gold which the *Red Rover* had brought so far.

CHAPTER XXXVI

A PUZZLING TURN IN THE TRAIL

It was indeed a happy Crocodile King who greeted the return of the *Red Rover.* No Viking chief ever received a conquering army with greater demonstration of joy, for did he not hold every boat that passed his way in the hollow of his hand?

As if in league with this black monster, nature at once climbed in with thunder, lightning and the most tremendous downpour of rain that Dave had ever experienced.

Black clouds, blotting out all, drove everyone to shelter. In an hour's time the steady going Black River had become a sea of racing yellow water.

"This is but the beginning," said the black

king in high glee as the downpour ceased. "It is the start of the rainy season. There will be more and more and more. Come, we will go to see the whirlpool. It is a wonder at such a time as this."

A half hour of travel over slippery trails brought them at last to a rocky parapet which overlooked the river. At that point the banks of the stream were rocky walls. Here through a narrow channel the torrent of water, rolling, tumbling, twisting, foaming, raced like a mighty Niagara. At the very center, as if set there for a trap, a seething, massive, dull-brown funnel flecked with foam, a mighty whirlpool swirled round and round.

"It is wonderful," whispered Dave. "And terrible!"

Even as they stood there an uprooted tree a hundred feet in length came floating down. Striking the whirlpool roots first, it swung round in a mad whirl three times. Then, as if sensing its fate, it rose straight upon its roots

to tower for an instant above the flood, then it was gone.

"To-morrow," said the Crocodile King, "it will not be so bad. The next day after that will come more rain, and it will always be bad. To-morrow my men will take you through. But the balata—the 'white gold,' do you call it? That you must leave with me. It will make the boat too heavy. It cannot be hauled so." There was greed in his beady eyes. "In time we will send it to you."

"And now," thought Dave, "he lies."

"This Crocodile King will not yield," Clinton said two hours later. "I have tried to reason with him. It's no use. We cannot pass that way without giving up the fruit of the summer's toil. This we will not do."

"What then?" said Dave in despair.

Clinton did not answer, but sat there long as if lost in deep thought.

"We'll have to try it alone, to-morrow," he said at last. "It's a desperate chance with

such a load as we are carrying, but it's the only way out."

As he remembered the dislodged giant of the forest whirling round and round in the pool's grasp, Dave felt a chill creep up his spine, but he said not one word.

True to the Crocodile King's prophecy, the morrow dawned fair and clear. The water had subsided appreciably during the night. Dave's hopes rose; but not for long.

"The *Red Rover* sprang a leak during the night," said Clinton as he returned from his morning inspection.

"That's queer," said Dave. "She's sound as a dollar. How could she?"

"That," said Clinton, with a shrug, "is what we must find out."

Three hours of arduous toil baling the *Red Rover* revealed at last a sprung plank in her forward bow.

"No accident," was Clinton's verdict.

"Someone's been tampering with her. Have to keep a sharp watch."

A watch was set, but all to no avail. Three times when they thought they were ready to start some unforeseen accident held them back.

"This old King," said Clinton at last, "is building an invisible wall about us."

"An invisible wall," Dave exclaimed. They were the very words of the Indian fortune teller.

"Walls are curious things," Clinton went on. "Sometimes when you cannot go over or through them, you can go around them. Send for Taraque."

For an hour Clinton and Taraque were closeted together. At the end, Dave saw the chief looking at Clinton's favorite rifle. There was a light of joyous possession in his eyes.

The chief went out to trade machetes and axes for foodstuffs, farinha, dry bread, dried fish and fresh fruit. By evening the *Red*

Rover and the war canoes were well stocked with these commodities.

That night, while the Crocodile King's riflemen watched the whirlpool, the *Red Rover* with her accompaniment of war canoes manned by Taraque and his men, glided away in the shadows upstream.

This time, however, instead of going up the left fork on which the homes of the chief's people were built, they chose the right fork which runs hundreds of miles into the unknown.

Dave, who had not been let in upon the secret of their purpose, found his mind in a whirl. Going up a strange stream at the beginning of a rainy season! Nothing, it seemed, could be a greater madness. Better, he believed, to give up their cargo, to at least save their lives and the precious secrets hidden away in the packages taken from the dead man's cabin. But having sworn allegiance to his chief, he asked no questions. Putting his

hand to a paddle, he instead helped to speed the *Red Rover* along.

Little he guessed at that moment that neither they nor their white gold would ever see Manaos, the city that had, until a few hours before, been their destination.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ORANGE PATCH

Curlie was in for something of a surprise when he started out with the owner of the phantom violin, who had promised to bring him safe to his own camp. He got it, too. It came with all the suddenness of an electric shock for, having fully assured himself that now at last he was found, that within an hour or two he would be with Dave and Clinton, he gave himself over to wondering about his strange guide and his unusual mission. The thing gave him a friendly feeling for that great South American Republic. He had always assumed that the people of South American republics were somehow devoid of humanitarian instincts. Yet here was a man in

the heart of the jungle doing the work of a missionary, paid by the government.

Of course, he knew at once that the "singing monkey" far down the river was another man in Indian Service. Had he known of that one close to the dead white man's cabin he would have understood that, too.

"So there were no ghosts and no singing monkeys," he said with a smile. "Just men—brave, unselfish men."

Just then a light shot through the bush—the light of a distant campfire. A moment later a patch of brightest orange struck his eye.

"Some new sort of bird," he thought.

The next moment he laughed out loud. The "bird" was a girl. The patch of orange was a sweater. Standing there in knickers and sweater, a rifle in her hand, peering into the night, she seemed a very goddess of the hunt.

"Don't shoot," the boy cried as she lifted the rifle. "It's only white folks."

"But who are you?" she asked a moment

later as he stood before her. Behind her in the shadows stood a lanky, bearded white man.

"I'll tell you," said Curlie, staring about him, and wondering with quite as much interest, whose camp this might be since it was not his own.

In an instant he knew, for back of the camp, bumping the bank, was a white boat—the same boat he and Dave had seen gliding upstream several weeks before.

Having accomplished his mission, the Brazilian bade them a polite goodnight.

Then, seating themselves on palm leaf mats, the three whites whose paths had crossed so strangely told of their adventures on the headwaters of the great river.

The man, Colonel Wamsley, had a brother who more than twenty years before had come to South America and had buried himself in the jungle. For many years, he wrote now and then of his work, his adventures, his hopes, his fears, his ambitions in a strange land.

"Then," said the girl, who had given her name as Andrena Wamsley, "when we had not heard from him for three years, father and I decided to come in search of him. But—" she sighed, "for four months we have searched in vain."

"My brother," the Englishman rumbled, "was a scientist of some repute. We have reason to believe, from things he has said in his letters, that he has made many valuable discoveries. It would be a great pity if his work were to perish with him here in the jungle."

"I saw you go upstream," said Curlie in wonder. "But how have you traveled all this time in a motor boat with no filling station within five hundred miles?"

"Our boat," the man replied, "is an oil burner. An oil burning engine uses any oil for fuel. The jungle is not without its oil. The crocodile and the manatee supply it. If this fails there are many oil bearing nuts. We have found friendly natives here and there who have hunted manatee and gathered nuts

for our crusher. We have not wanted for oil. And the natives have been splendid.

"All but one!" he exclaimed suddenly. "That man they call the Crocodile King levied such a tribute upon us that we were left almost destitute. When we go down, which we shall do shortly, we will glide silently by in the night."

Curlie thought of the whirlpool, and wondered.

In a moment this thought was displaced by another. "I don't want to awaken false hopes," he said, thoughtfully, "but before I was lost in the jungle, while I was still with my friends in the balata camp, I often heard the old chief, Taraque, tell of a mysterious white man who had gone up the river to live among the dwarfs. Could that have been your brother?"

"It might have been." The Englishman's tone was eager. "Tell me more about him."

"I know nothing except that the natives thought of him almost as a god, that he is

now dead, that he was accustomed to play the violin, and that they believe that his spirit still plays the violin in treetops at night, the Phantom Violin."

"The Phantom Violin!" exclaimed the girl.

"Yes, there was one of a sort. It has been explained."

"Tell me about it." The girl leaned eagerly forward. So by the light of the dying campfire, with the grizzled Englishman nodding and dozing in his place, Curlie told his jungle adventures to this glorious English girl of dark brown hair and glowing cheeks. In the end they came to think of one another as lifelong friends. So will an acquaintance sometimes ripen in an hour where there is only jungle and great isolation.

Next morning found the Englishman sorely tempted to turn back upstream for the purpose of exploring the branch where the balata camp had stood.

Overcoming his desire to return to his comrades, Curlie advised against this. The season,

he pointed out, was well advanced. They would soon be having storms and swollen streams. That might mean staying at the head of the Black River for long months. Manifestly this was no place for white men, let alone a girl, to tarry long without proper food or equipment.

This counsel prevailed. Three nights later, just as a terrific downpour of rain had ceased and the moon shone out full and clear, they found themselves nearing the home of the Crocodile King.

Had Curlie been asked, he would have advised against trying this dangerous passage without aid from the king's men. His counsel had not been asked. Being an American boy, with all the bravery and chivalry of a Puritan coursing through his veins, he could not desert the girl he had come to respect and admire. She must not brave the perils of swirling waters with only her aged father as a protector. So, setting his teeth hard, he listened to the dis-

tant roar of waters and prayed as he had never prayed before that some hand might be reached to them across the waters in their moment of great need.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN THE WHIRLPOOL

Some time later as they glided silently down through the shadows opposite the Crocodile King's house, they saw a wavering light lift, drop, lift and drop, lift and drop three times, then blink out.

"What is it?" The English girl's voice was tense as she gripped Curlie's arm. "Have we been seen?"

"Who knows? It may have been a signal."

Curlie was not thinking of the Crocodile King and his men just then. He was thinking of the whirlpool. The river was high. Ten minutes more and they would be in the grip of madly whirling waters. The grip might mean death. Yet, with the fixed stolidity of

his kind, the Englishman showed no sign of turning back.

A moment sped into eternity, another and another. Louder and louder came the roar of waters. They glided along a high bank. Their speed increased. A jutting rock shot past them. The water became troubled and angry. They waited in breathless silence. Then came their first view of the terrible funnel-like pool. Like some sleeping beast, the pool at that moment lay apparently placid. The moon, a great golden ball, rested upon its surface.

Then, as if waking from an ugly dream, the pool seized the moon and, after tearing it to bits, swallowed it as a cat swallows a golden canary.

Curlie shuddered. The girl sat rigid in her seat. The Englishman did not stir.

With a sudden swerve their boat took to the rim of the pool. With a speed that was astounding they shot about in a wide circle.

"It is the end," thought Curlie. At that moment he fancied seeing himself spinning like a top at the bottom of the pool, spinning, spinning endlessly round and round.

But what was this? Something cut at his cheek. He snatched at it desperately. He missed that one, but caught another, the swaying branch of an uprooted tree that had lodged at the edge of the pool.

His grip held. The boat paused. He felt himself slipping. A pair of strong young arms gripped him about the waist.

"The girl," he thought.

There came the purring of a motor. The engine was started. The strain on his arms lessened. Then it grew stronger. The mad pool would not let them go.

But now, leaving his place, the Englishman gripped a branch.

It was a terrible battle that followed. Now they gained, now they lost. Now the tree threatened to pull away and send them to a terrible death. In the end it held.

Then, of a sudden, when strength was ebbing and hope was all but gone, the pool became once more a placid pond mirroring the moon. At that instant the Englishman sprang to the wheel and, ten seconds later, they were free, floating in an eddy a hundred yards beyond the perilous pool.

The drama of the night was not done. Even as they paused for breath and a prayer of thanksgiving, a black spot appeared at the pool's rim.

"A canoe!" Curlie exclaimed. "The Crocodile King! We are lost!"

But were they? Even as they watched they seemed to sense that something was wrong with the king and his crew. They had gotten away with too few men, or the wrong men, or paddles had broken. The king was standing up, a perilous position in such a place.

Even as they passed beneath the branches of the lodged tree, the black king threw out his fat hands to grip them. The next instant

the canoe shot onward about the rim of the pool. Left dangling there, he uttered one wild scream, then, dragged down by his great weight, lost his hold and dropped into the seething water.

On and on round the rim came the canoe. Again the branches were caught. This time, gripped by the sinewy hands of Indian warriors, they swung down and arrested the progress of the canoe. They were saved. But the Crocodile King was seen no more. He had gone to his just reward.

The white boat paused no longer, but went gliding down the Black River, on and on into the shadows of the night.

Ten days later she docked at the first river steamer landing.

At once Curlie went to enquire regarding Dave and Clinton. No word had come from them. Little wonder for, at that time, battling swollen currents, drenched with rain, but still struggling hopefully onward, they were working their way up a stream that was

strange even to the old chief. They were two hundred miles up from the home of the Crocodile King and, with loaded canoes, were still battling their way onward into a land that not one of them had ever seen.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SURPRISES FOR ALL

"So that was the Amazon!" Curlie laughed in a strained manner as he spoke these words, then looked in the English girl's eyes. They were on board the sturdy little British Mail Packet, the Orissa. The jungle with its mighty river was at their backs. They were outward bound.

"Do you know," the boy's voice was husky, "when I was a boy I longed to see that river. Wanted to hunt wild animals on it and all that. But now I've been there and have come away, I—I feel sort of queer about it. Oh, it's been wild, exciting and all that. But, do you know, I don't think I'd like to go back."

The girl looked into his eyes, but she did not

smile. She knew well enough that he was thinking of his good pal Dave and his friend Clinton. High water and lack of transportation had held him in the rubber metropolis for a month, but in all that time not one word had come down the river from them.

The girl too was sad. She had come a long way in the hope that she might be of some assistance to her father in finding some trace of his lost brother. In this they had entirely failed. Having acknowledged defeat, they were returning home. So they stood there in silent communion until the last trace of the mighty Amazon was lost to their view.

On her homeward passage the Orissa was to cruise along the coast of South America, stopping here and there for passengers and cargo until she left Angastura at the mouth of the Orinoco. She was then to sail to Liverpool by way of New York.

When they arrived at Angastura Curlie and the girl came on deck to take one farewell

look at the tropical world they had found so weird and fascinating.

As he looked down upon the milling throng on the dock Curlie's heart skipped a beat. Over to the left, at the edge of the throng, was a fellow with his cap pulled well down over his eyes. There was an indescribable something about the stoop of those broad shoulders that had sent a thrill shooting through and through him.

When at last the figure moved, when he turned to shrug his shoulders in impatience at a Spaniard who did not understand, Curlie knew. It was Dave.

"Dave! Dave!" he shouted. Then, unable to believe his senses, he shouted no more. Dave here? How could it be? Dave at the mouth of the Orinoco, more than a thousand miles over a vast uninhabited land from the place where he had seen him last? It could not be.

Yet it was. For, having heard the call, the boy had looked up. *It was Dave!* Staring up

at Curlie and looking for all the world as if he had seen a ghost, he stood there motionless. Ten minutes later they were together, fairly hugging one another in their excitement and great joy.

* * *

"See that?" Dave pointed to a large map spread out on his berth on the Orissa as, a few hours later, they steamed out to sea. "Look at that stretch of river called the Casiquaire. What system would you say it belonged to?"

"To the Amazon. No, the Orinoco. By jove! No. Why it must belong to both."

"To neither or to both," laughed Dave. "That's the secret."

"That—"

"That's how we came to Angastura instead of going down the Amazon. Clinton is a wizard. There is nothing he does not know. He knew that one fork of the Rio Negro joins with the upper waters of the Orinoco and that, once we reached the divide we could go

down the Orinoco and reach trade centers in safety.

"So when that crafty old Crocodile King tried to rob us, he took the sure hard way. Taraque helped us to the divide. There we gave him Clinton's pet rifle and all the trade goods we could spare.

"The rest was easy; simply floating the *Red Rover* down the Orinoco to a large trading center, catching a steamer there, selling our balata at Angastura, and here you are."

Snapping the lock on the door, he unstrapped a money belt which was well lined with American bank notes.

"The balata money," he said simply. "Half is yours."

"G—grand!" said Curlie a bit unsteadily. Time after time they had lost. Now at last they had won.

"But look," he said as he rolled a handful of gray stones on the table.

"You found the diamond mine?"

"Found it and lost it again. Lost it for good."

"You wouldn't go back?"

"No—o. Not for a long time at least. I—I'd have to forget." As he closed his eyes his face seemed to grow suddenly old as he pictured the hardships he had endured.

"We'll sell the diamonds for what they will bring," he said after a moment's thought. "Then we will put what we get for them with the balata money and split it fifty-fifty. We are partners always."

"No! No!" said Dave. "The diamonds are yours. You found them."

"But you saved the white gold. Fifty-fifty; partners always." And so in the end it was.

Clinton and the Englishman Wamsley had not been together for a half hour before it was discovered that the manuscripts and the precious medical secrets, which Clinton had risked so much to bring out, had been the possessions of Wamsley's long lost brother. Had other evidence been lacking, the ancient violin,

a Wamsley heirloom for generations, carried from the dead man's cabin by Dave, would have been proof enough. So in the end, after they had counted it lost, the two fine English people found their search rewarded. All that had belonged to the jungle philanthropist was turned over to them.

"Do you remember that Indian fortune teller in Manaos?" asked Curlie as they walked the deck on their first morning out to sea.

"Do I?" said Dave.

"She missed it a little. I did return to Manaos."

"The expedition didn't," said Dave. "And you came very near not returning at all. I'd say that was coming close enough. Be a long time before I have my fortune told again."

"At least in Manaos," Curlie agreed.

The proceeds of the balata hunt and the sale of diamonds (which being of low grade were not worth a great fortune) were divided by the two boys. Dave at once began completing his studies in a great university. He

meant in time to follow in the footsteps of Clinton and become an anthropologist.

As for Curlie, he invested his money, hoping in time to gather up courage for some other journey into unusual and little known lands. The story of his further adventures is told in our next book, "The Rope of Gold."

"Up the Amazon," he is heard to say at times, "that's the place to go. Diamonds and white gold, savages and wild animals. But then, but then—"

THE END.